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# A Risky Engagement by Mozart

**Summary:** Oh, sure. They laughed when you told them he could beat you at chess with only three pieces on his side of the board. They even laughed when you said that he fed your old pet hamster to a python "as an experiment." But when you told them that you were his fiancée, THEN you lost your credibility.

[Reader x Sherlock Holmes]

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## Chapter 1: Amor ti vieta

**Author's Notes:** i swear i have the biggest SEG on right now
he is
he is such a fucking prick
and i love him so much

---

It seemed fitting, anyway–he *did* know everything about you. Or at least he pretended to. Or tried to.

Not that he would ever admit to it. Why *would* he? To everyone else, you had a master poker face, but to him, you wore your heart on your sleeve and your world on your face. It would take ~~John Watson~~ an idiot to *not* be able to pick out every little fact of your life just by watching how you went about your day.

And he *did* watch you.

How did you know…? Well, you wouldn't have had the slightest suspicion. But you found out ages ago when the Mr. Sherlock Holmes himself came up to you and told you exactly everything.

"When you come in to work, your skirt is straight but your blouse is never buttoned correctly–a sign that you wake up late for work so regularly that you get half of your outfit correct but neglect the (perhaps) more 'challenging' aspects of your wardrobe…this is backed up by your hastily thrown-on jacket that is meant to match your skirt but is consistently one to two shades lighter. Not only that, but one side of your hair is usually groomed neater than the other, suggesting that, in your rush to run out the door, you give up after brushing one side."

"Uh," you replied.

"You never get enough to eat for breakfast, considering that your stomach rumblings become quite animalistic before even noon, which explains the fluctuations in your weight…you *do* realize that it's only healthy for a young woman like yourself to *eat* three meals a day, correct? You should be more responsible…it becomes all the more obvious when you have an increase in clients. You hardly eat and your hair loses its sheen by midafternoon. Disastrous."

You were just staring now. Your key wasn't even all the way in the door to your office. Even your stomach had silenced its usual bitching to hear Sherlock finish.

"That being said–along with another hundred tidbits I've left out because I have more important matters to attend to–it's quite clear that you live alone and have no one attending to you. It seems to me that you need someone to take care of you, ideally a man…you know what I'm getting at, don't you?"

Not really. It looked like your cat wasn't doing a good enough job…

"A man to wake you up on time, get you something to eat, make sure you look *half*way decent when you're running out the door, kiss you good-bye and all that clichéd nonsense. I'm sure that no man anywhere in London would agree to be a babysitter, as the job surely *sounds*, so I'm afraid that you're the sort of woman who was born to find a good husband."

"…really…?"

"Then again, I wouldn't say that you will find a *good* husband. He might be someone you can't stand. But being in your desperate sort of position, you'll have to put up with it. That sort of challenge would be hard on his side, too. You're dreadfully unmindful, and careless, so after a year or two you would probably have your victim committed. I suppose that even I would struggle at such a career, although I'm confident that I would be able to train you to be a somewhat self-sufficient and even, dare I say it, *happy* human being."

And now he watched you carefully for your reaction. At first you were still dumbfounded–you were still frozen in the middle of your effort to unlock your door–then, a struggle to find a retort to his insults–finally, shock and disbelief at what you'd heard.

Sherlock shrugged and glanced back at the art on the wall across the hall from him.

The experiment would continue on another day. For now, he finished with measured carelessness.

"But of course," he said, "I'm only *suggesting.*"

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## Chapter 2: Ah si' ben mio coll'essere

**Author's Notes:** I promise mostly that this is the last anachronistic chapter, after this I'll go to a mild effort to make sure everything's in order unless I feel like adding some Sherlock fluff (which is not fluff at all because it's him) and oh *shit* I actually have to figure out how Rea-tan meets Sherlock for the first time

-panics- IS THIS WHAT FRIENDS ARE SUPPOSED TO HELP YOU WITH. OH SHIT I FORGOT I DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS

---

You were connected to *him*--that psychopath, that freak of nature, that asshole–and that's exactly why *they* didn't like you.

Inspector Lestrade didn't mind you, which was why you tended to hang around him the most. *He* wasn't the problem. *He* let you do your damned job. But for some reason, *they* wouldn't let you walk three steps in any direction without attaching some sort of snarky comment to it.

"I think working with psychopaths all day has gotten to her head," Donovan muttered to Anderson a great deal too loudly.

"Tell me about it," Anderson replied. "Now she's got it bad for one."

Meanwhile, you tried to do your fucking job with Lestrade in an attempt to ignore them.

"So Kurtz was strangled before being robbed," you noted, looking at the big-breasted victim with some disinterest. "That's boring. That's stupid. If you want to mug someone, you do it fast. Stabbing or shooting, if *anything*, and if you're dumb enough to use your hands you don't bother aiming to wrap them around someone's neck. It takes a lot of time and effort to strangle someone, and even with murder it's boring unless you know the other person."

"So you're saying that the killer knew Kurtz? Why bother going to the effort of making it look like a mugging?"

"I'm just saying…if *I* were a murderer, I'd–"

"See?" Donovan snapped. "She's already homicidal, like that *freak.* I'm telling you that they're dating."

"They're *both* freaks. They're practically *made* for each other."

You made an effort to clear your throat as audibly as possible. These were the days that made you regret being employed at Scotland Yard. Besides the fact that the majority of criminal intent you had to "analyze" was incredibly obvious, you also had to deal with goddamn Donovan and goddamn Anderson. And the worst part was–you *were* really only in this job for the dead bodies and getting to talk to serial killers. But who could blame you? Who could *really* blame you? Everyone wanted to see the dead bodies! It was your job to look at them! Did it make you a freak? Whatever!

"I'm going back to the office," you grumbled. "I think I'm done here. Let me know if there are any new developments, anything like that…"

You were about to leave, and leave it at that, but ~~Sherlock's assholish nature was rubbing off on you~~ you weren't content to be slapped in the face and left to walk away. Your jacket may not match your skirt but your tongue could certainly match the snarky expression in your eyes.

"You know," you told your least favorite couple, "you're wrong. Sherlock and I aren't dating."

Donovan was suspicious. "Oh, *real*ly?"

You smiled faintly–and then, what you'd been waiting to say all month: "That's right. We're engaged."

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## Chapter 3: Di rigori armato il seno

**Author's Notes:** I promise I'll write about why the chapter titles are all from operas but for right now oh my god I NEED TO STPO MAKING THESE SO LONG and ftr I hold my umbrella like that because I think it looks nice despite the fact that I always get hit in the face with the rain BUT I LOOK GOOD

omfg
you are all reading it for Sherlock
*but I know your hearts belong to Jim Moriarty*

---

The first time you had ever met Sherlock Holmes–oh, *God.* It's nothing, it's just–I can't even lead into it with some sort of fuzzy, nostalgic diction. If the two of you ever mistakenly procreate (by the grace of Satan), you supposed that you'd have to lie to your children about how you met. You would tell them that you met innocently, like in a library or in a shop…definitely not on a bridge on a rainy day.

He could probably remember the day better than you, if he chose to. If he thought it was *important* enough, that is, and you wouldn't doubt that he shoved it out of his mind entirely along with the heliocentric theory. Of course he would never tell you that he remembered everything about it, but that's beside the point.

The day that Sherlock Holmes met you was no sunny day. There were clouds in the sky, yes, and all of them were raining down on him in a cold, irritating drizzle. He was coming to a crime scene only because there was nothing better to do, and he was looking forward to a *grisly* crime scene.

The victim had been half-killed before being thrown off the side of a bridge into a ditch/shallow creek/sewage shit/some combination of the three. The bridge itself, however, was not crowded with the usual sheeplike rubberneckers, or worse, his least favorite policemen. Instead, it was inhabited by a lone figure–a woman, judging by her figure, but obscured by the umbrella she had set against her shoulder. His first impression was that she was mentally defective, seeing as how she was probably getting hit in the face with the rain, but when he approached he found her to be staring down, down, down at the void beneath her. Her expression was, from his angle, a mystery, although it wasn't hard to guess what people think when they stare off a bridge.

He had the inclination to leave her be and let her face whatever was at the bottom, which would be her own body splattered halfway from here to Hell. But something drew him to approach her. What was it? Not fate, he'd tell you–fate was "a superstition held by ignorant people in an attempt to explain everyday occurrences." No…probably not.

And now, the first words Sherlock Holmes ever said to you. Better write this one down and scrapbook it somewhere.

"You know," he said, "if you want to jump to your death, perhaps you should choose a better bridge. From here, you would probably break most of your bones and cause a great deal of trouble for everybody. I'm not trying to dissuade you, but if you're going to off yourself, for God's sake don't be selfish about it."

You turned to look at him, and at once Sherlock Holmes was faced with, erm…that is to say…well…you were an aesthetically attractive human being. Very symmetrical. It would be stupidly John Watson of him to think that you were the prettiest girl he'd ever encountered, and he'd be damned if he ever sunk to *that* kind of lovey-dovey low. ~~But you were~~ You weren't, of course.

"Who, me?" You shifted your umbrella a little, but you still seemed unconcerned about the rain was falling in the wrong angle for it to be of any use. "You think *I*…want to jump…?"

You mulled this over for a minute before breaking out into ~~delightful~~ laughter. Nonchalantly you continued on. "Oh, no, you've got me wrong. I'm looking at a dead body!"

*Damn. Great. Shit. He's actually kind of nice-looking. Recover! Quick! You can do this! Make a smooth recovery!* ***Smooth****!*

"I mean, that is...I'm thinking to myself, 'if I were a murderer, why would I *throw* a half-dead man off of a bridge?'"

*Close enough.*

Criminology didn't get you much meat. You would admit it. But to your surprise, this man offered you a slight smile, as if he as rewarding your efforts to be a halfway normal human being.

"I take it you're with Lestrade," he noted laconically.

"Ah! That's right. And you must be on the case, too." You paused and then nodded. "That's right, that's right…that consulting detective. I know you by reputation."

"I don't concern myself with the opinions of the stupid. It's rather disappointing that common people waste the little brainpower they have on inventing something I don't care about."

"Don't be silly. I've heard lovely things about you."

Hell must have frozen over. "We've only just met. It's quite unnecessary to lie to make me feel better; I couldn't care less."

Pause.

"But who said that?"

You blanched. New Scotland Yard only extolled Sherlock Holmes on Opposite Day. "Molly Hooper."

"Predictable."

Someone was calling up for you to come down, so by pure coincidence he was walking side-by-side with you down the ravine. Conclusively, your umbrella was a completely aesthetic instrument, as you cheerfully kept it propped on your shoulder the whole way down. Despite this, he couldn't deduce anything that would lead him to believe that you were an idiot. Not yet, at least. Time would tell.

"This one's a messy one," Lestrade explained, glancing casually at the body that was the star of the show. To you, it looked a little better than the human equivalent of a watermelon thrown out a window, which you'd encountered twice before this week. "Fingertips cut off, tongue cut out, even his eyeballs were gouged out. This is the third body this week that's turned up like this, except *he* was alive after all of it."

Well…the criminal intent on *this* would be fun to figure out.

"The man, Hanaway, was alive when he hit the bottom of the ravine. Gave a lady on the bridge quite a shock. By the time she called for help, he was dead. The murderer must have thrown him on the other side while he was still alive."

"What an idiot," you and Sherlock said concurrently.

An uncomfortable pause as the caravan of officers stared at you.

"Well," you said, attempting a logical recovery, "if you're going to murder someone, why in God's name wouldn't you finish him off properly like you did the last two times? Wow! And dumping a body off in a public area. Our murderer has degraded."

"God damn," Donovan swore under her breath. "There's two of them, now."

"Did anyone actually *see* Hanaway get thrown off the bridge?" Sherlock continued on impatiently.

"I don't get your meaning."

"If I had my eyes gouged out," you supplemented, "I might not be able to see where I was going, either."

"That solves our mystery of a suddenly inept murderer…"

You squatted down to inspect the body yourself–not too close, or else you'd get decomposition on your nice rain boots. Hanaway, for some reason, was wearing women's lingerie, which you supposed that you'd have to explain somewhere down the line. It was high time for you to get upset, cry, vomit, or do all three at the same time. Instead, you did your job, which was to treat the whole thing like a science experiment.

"What links all of these victims together, Lestrade?"

"So far we've found nothing. Different races, genders, and backgrounds."

You sighed and straightened. "I'll see you at the autopsy, then. I'll get reports and try to string something together."

Sherlock Holmes had an unlimited number of insults at the ready: anything to deride your profession, your competence, everything from your pay to your expression. And he was practically obligated to say *something.* But then you made *that* goddamn remark…

"That just makes my job harder. Random killers are the garbagemen of the murdering world. They have no finesse, and their criminal intent usually boils down to some unresolved mommy issue."

And with that, every affront he had prepared for you escape his mind like falling stars. Blank. For the first time in probably *ever,* he simply had nothing to say. The fact that you had (momentarily) evaded offense from Sherlock "That Asshole Git" Holmes was worthy of some sort of award, but you were none the wiser. *You* still hadn't even remembered his name. But you were about to remedy that.

You were walking past when the thought struck you, so you turned on your heel to face him and smiled. "Wow! You must think I'm a total idiot, right?"

"He thinks everyone's an idiot," Donovan snapped.

"I don't recall your name," you continued. "If you think it's important enough for me to know, that is…what is it?"

"Holmes," he said insouciantly. "Sherlock Holmes."

"Do you shake hands? Ah, here…yes…" And then you told him your name. "It was nice meeting you. Good-bye."

That was it. He simply needed time to figure out something to dislike about you. The next time seeing you, probably. He'd take one look at you and decide that you were an idiot, or lazy, or incompetent or sloppy or anything else that would give him a proper justification for not paying any attention to you. Because, for now, he remembered your name quite clearly and he wasn't sure he liked that. But it was something new and different, and I suppose that there's something to be said for that.

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## Chapter 4: Recondita armonia

**Author's Notes:** "So this is just going to be a short chapter, I mean, I don't want to mislead everyone into believing that everything's gonna be really long" -45 minutes later- "Well fuck"

so I'm part of ~*~a Facebook group~*~ for Sherlock writers. And I feel speshul and wanted to write something for then even though I constantly fear that I'm disappointing everyone who thought that this would be a quality story

---

The next time you saw Sherlock Holmes, you were in a lift with him. Said lift was stuck between floors, which neither surprised nor distressed you–it had been worse two weeks ago, when you'd been trapped with a bald woman who insisted that she'd seen you in a vision that involved death, church bells and apple pie. Now, *that* had been an adventure. But you didn't know enough about Sherlock Holmes to dislike him, and you were fairly certain that he barely you knew as well, so you couldn't fathom why he insisted on keeping his distance from you in the claustrophobic space.

*Molly did say that he could tell everything about a person just by looking at them,* you recalled with some distress. *What if he knows everything about* me *without my ever saying anything? Oh, God! I gained weight since the last time I saw him! If he says anything about it, then I swear to God the lift doors are going up to his corpse…*

But Sherlock seemed to be making a conscious effort to pay no attention to you at all. As you methodically pressed the lift buttons, trying to trick it into some sort of movement, you wondered if you should stop looking back at him and try to start some sort of conversation. After all, he might have deduced that you were a serial killer or some shit like that, from the way that you watched him without saying anything.

What did people say in normal conversation, anyway? You weren't used to holding discussions that didn't involve "off-limits" material. That was probably why you didn't get too many dates. But you gave it a shot.

"It's a shame we're missing such nice weather," you remarked evenly.

"Hm, yes."

*Well, I tried.* You sighed. Other women had it so much easier. You wondered what it would be like to possess that effortless power to attract men…that elusive swing of the hips as you walked, the demure upward glance, the light chuckle and perfect smile. It was all bullshit to you. Coquettish women were boring as fuck and you wondered just what they did with their boyfriends in their spare time. But apparently all of it was instrumental in finding a husband, since your loneliness seemed to be a direct result of your unapologetic intelligence.

Whatever. If you couldn't master the art of being pretty, then you wouldn't try. You would rather remain single for all of your days than be with some boring man who was only interested in you because you did what you were supposed to. So you returned to your usual state.

"I actually don't care about the weather," you mumbled, continuing to work the buttons. "I like it when it rains."

"You live in London."

"Point taken." You paused. "Are you trying to ignore me?"

"That's a childish assumption."

"And I'd think so myself, if you *looked* at me when you said that."

He glared. "You've done nothing to interest me."

"Don't be a bully," you replied, flapping your spare hand nonchalantly. "You're not even trying. Wow! Do you really hate me or something?"

"I would expect to hear that from a teenage schoolgirl. What a mewling allegation."

"Actually, I'm trying to get a reaction. It's easier to talk to criminals when they're upset. Are you a criminal, Mr. Holmes?"

He was not used to being teased, and was incredibly suspicious as a result. Few women actually had motivation to actually carry on a conversation with him after the first few insults, but you didn't seem too bothered by any of it. But then again, you spent your time profiling serial killers, and you had probably become bored with hearing your own abuse.

"Don't answer that," you went on. "You would make for an entertaining criminal. I mean, not circus-entertaining. But you would at least *try*. I wouldn't mind staying up to profile you. They tell me that you can learn everything about a person just by looking at them."

"They're easily impressed because they're completely ignorant," he told you. "Anyone can make a deduction through simple observation. Even *you* could, provided that you're not defective."

"*Even* me? You flatter me." You turned to look at him and you smiled. "I only deduce criminals. That's not a charming skill to have. What would I say about you?"

…he waited.

"Well, Mr. Holmes…you'd be a lot more attractive than the criminals I'm used to." You pushed two buttons together simultaneously, and you could have sworn that you heard something moving. When you looked back, he was staring at you, and you sure *hoped* that wasn't hatred in his eyes, because it sure looked like it. Or maybe he was dryly amused. You weren't sure. You'd had a long night with staring at the same mugshot of a serial rapist, and you were a little fuzzy on body language.

"I suppose you're like every common person, waiting for me to deduce some little factoid about you," he remarked sardonically.

"If you want to, go ahead," you replied. "I don't see much else to look at in here, except that poster to your left about cosmetic surgery."

And now he really did look at you, which only lasted a matter of seconds, but you took it upon yourself to stare intently at the lift doors.

There was a humming, then a noise like two robots having a fistfight, and the lift started to move again. In the time it took the lift to move one floor down to ground level, he told you everything that you had no idea about.

"You own a cat, but also a smaller animal, perhaps a gerbil, but I'm settling on 'hamster.' You have a chronic lack of sleep. You haven't manicured your nails, but it's safe to say that you don't bother with it at all. You're right-handed but you try to write with your left hand on occasion. And at night you prefer to sleep with no pants on."

*Ding.* As you struggled to argue–which you couldn't, seeing as how he was 100% correct–Sherlock casually left the lift with one parting remark:

"And you have no boyfriend."

"What?" you cried, hurrying out to catch up with him. "Wow! That's hardly fair."

"Have I met your expectations?" he asked casually.

"Well, yes, you're right about everything, but…"

It's not like you could *ask* it. Did you look desperate or something? Had you been too forward? Did you not smell like you'd been rolling in some man's sheets? God dammit, was there some special way of applying eyeliner that differed for whether or not you had a boyfriend? Or did you just scream *I'm single* from every pore of your body?

And as the two of you parted he looked at you and smiled. You had no idea *why,* but you weren't really sure that you liked it.

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## Chapter 5: M'appari

**Author's Notes:** so apparently Fanfiction.net lets you have reader-insert stories
i'm so old
*i had no idea they let you do that recently*

ffs Sherlock it's called people-watching *we do it all the time*

And I also heard that cool people make music tracks to go with their stories so here you go, it's pretty mood-swingy

---

To your credit, you were a lot more tolerant of Sherlock Holmes than the rest of New Scotland Yard. Which means that you were one of the four people who didn't make excuses to leave the room whenever he was around, the other three being Molly Hooper, Lestrade (probably), and…well, you weren't sure about the fourth, but you wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Later, when you were dating, you'd tell him why: "It's not that I *appreciated* it–I'm not a masochist, for Christ's sakes–but at least you were able to insult me with some sort of *eloquence*. I was used to sitting across a table from a handcuffed killer who insisted on referring to me as a 'stupid fucking munter.' So at least you had a little bit of *class*. And you didn't *curse*."

He met you again while working on a case. It was pure coincidence, mind you. You sat reading a book on a bench. There were any number of places you could have read, but you seemed determined to place your rear on a freezing street bench on a windy day.

Sherlock had the full intention of passing you without saying anything, mostly because he disliked the way he wanted to talk to you. He didn't want to talk to you on the sole principle that he really did want to talk to you. He no longer thought that you were a common sort of person, and that was another reason he wanted to avoid you. He wanted to avoid the inevitable expectation: you wanting to be friends and then realizing that he had a personality that only 1% of the world's population could get along with. And then you'd hate him. So why not cut out that messy middle bit where he was expected to feel all warm and happy?

You seemed engrossed in your novel (which, by his deduction, was a library book about thirty years old, first edition, and you placed it too close to water, which he couldn't figure out at all), and the street was filled with people, yet when he passed you managed to look up at the right time to say, "Well, hello, Mr. Holmes."

Begrudgingly, he turned to face you. "It's you."

"Of course." You took that as a sort of normal greeting. You loosened the scarf around your mouth and asked, "What are you doing around here?"

"I'm to find a client, a widow who refuses to visit me in my apartment, who I've only spoke to over the phone, and who asked me to visit her in a crowded area but who failed to give me any sort of self-description."

"So she feels threatened," you mused, closing your book. "That sounds tedious. Why did you agree to it?"

"She seemed in spectacular need."

You gave him a look. "I'll ask again, then. *Why* did you agree to it?"

"She's a friend."

"Of *you*?"

"Of my landlady."

"And what does she need to talk to *you* for?"

"Oh, something tedious. She claims she's being stalked wherever she goes. If things go well this will take all of five minutes. From what I gather she's over middle aged, straddling the delicate border between overweight and obesity while–"

"She's over there," you interrupted, pointing. "That must be her."

And now Sherlock Holmes looked to see a short, portly woman on a different bench some distance away. She was talking nonstop to a fellow who'd sat next to her despite the fact that he didn't seem to know her at all.

He was irritated, mostly because you were right.

"How did you know that?" he demanded.

"What, so I'm right?" You were a little proud of yourself. "Wow! How do *you* know?"

"She's wearing the same earrings that belonged to my landlady but have disappeared over the last two months–doubtlessly, my client has felt the need to borrow them to get over her insurmountable grief. She's dyed her hair, obvious by the roots, and in addition she's acquired herself a new wardrobe in some pathetic attempt to start a new life. Very predictable. I'll ask you again. *How* did you know that?"

"Well, um." You supposed that your reasoning was a lot less impressive, and you fidgeted. "She was talking a lot. She seemed lonely. And you said she was scared of being followed, and she kept looking over her shoulder."

And Sherlock Holmes said, "It was nice seeing you again."

"You don't have to make it too obvious that you're lying, you know." You opened your book up again and secured your scarf so that he couldn't make fun of the fact that you were smiling. "Good luck with the widow."

When he walked over to where his client sat, he turned and saw a couple sitting inside of a diner, mooning over each other without saying a word. He thought it looked incredibly stupid, but for just a moment he wondered what it would be like to take you out to dinner and have you talk to him. And he thought that he might even enjoy it, just a little bit, but of course such thoughts were immediately replaced by those that were infinitely more important. But he did think about you.

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## Chapter 6: Ancora un passo

**Author's Notes:** Why I wouldn't be compatible with Sherlock Holmes v.1:
"you've gained some more weight"
"stfu nobody asked you"
"probably because your aversion to jogging"
"motherfucKER DO YOU WANT TO SLEEP OUTSIDE"

if Watson were here he'd probably take Rea-tan's place lolololo*hgod* I want to write Watson and Rea-tan so bad but he's not around until a couple more chapters wHY and lastly I know I'm probably missing a lot of posh English slang but I live in *the land of the free and I'm going to talk American*

---

Sherlock was at an impasse. He was doing his best to *not* think about you, but for once, that seemed to be impossible. He thought about you when he was working on a case–he thought about you when he wasn't. He thought about you when playing the fucking violin. This was not acceptable. You might call this "anti-acceptable" and he would call you an idiot.

So you were a distraction. A major distraction. And he made it worse by making an effort to not pay you any attention, which was useless, because when you were around he watched you anyway. Just by existing, you made it worse. You were already under his skin.

All right, then. *All right*. Fine. He could deal with this. He didn't trust the female gender, but he could at least deal with them. Men and women were equally primitive, and if he could combat one gender, he could hold his own against the other. Right. It wouldn't be too difficult. He only had to endure being with you just long enough for him to observe you, and once he'd observed you he'd gather enough to justify not being impressed with you. In short, he was setting you up for failure. You would tease him endlessly about this later, but for now, you were none the wiser.

The last time you'd spoken to Sherlock Holmes, he'd told you that you were born to be a wife. Having mulled it over, you wondered if it was supposed to be a compliment. But this was Sherlock we were talking about, so you guessed it wasn't.

Ever since he'd pointed out the fact that you didn't take care of yourself well, you had tried your best to get up on time and dress properly, but you'd given up the quest after a couple of days. So what if your fucking skirt didn't match your fucking jacket? Nobody noticed. Well–nobody except *him*. You were more obsessed with what he *wasn't* telling you. Good Lord! Were you walking the streets of London looking like a slob, getting judged, without your knowing?

Let's see–today, you were in your office, sincerely enjoying the nice day because it meant you could take your heels off without your feet getting cold. It was a slow day with no criminal activity, which would have been boring for you, but you'd worked so much over the last few days that you were glad to have a break. You wouldn't go down to the shooting range today, no... To the annoyance of the rest of New Scotland Yard, this was shaping up to be another Opera Day…you looked for *The Marriage of Figaro*.

You were bent over your pitiful, worn-out vinyl collection, but despite your searching it seemed that the record was deliberately avoiding you. And that might have been a good thing, *maybe*, but it was probably bad because a minute later you heard someone clearing their throat behind you.

Your first instinct was to whip around like you'd been caught in the middle of a scandal, but that meant you would have dropped your precious music, so instead you slowly turned to see Sherlock Holmes sitting in the chair opposite your desk.

"Um," you said, "hello. I wasn't expecting you."

You willed yourself to not get embarrassed at the fact that Sherlock had gotten a front-row view of your ass. Great. And he was probably about to point out that you'd gained another couple of pounds and now your skirt was getting tight on you. Shit. *Shit*. At least he wasn't a pervert, right? Right? You were pretty sure that sort of stuff was beneath him. You hoped so. You *prayed* so, at this moment.

"Let me guess–this is the chair that your criminals sit in, when you talk with them," Sherlock predicted rightly, "and you're about to say that I must look like a criminal to you."

"Well, unless Lestrade is a criminal, I don't believe that everyone who sits there is," you pointed out, taking a seat. "But you must need something. What's the matter?"

Sherlock said nothing–instead, he stared intently at you, and you wondered with horror whether or not he was doing his observation-thingy again. You wondered if he was going to taunt you for what you'd eaten for lunch, or that you'd forgotten to floss yesterday, or that you had once more failed to button your blouse correctly but you couldn't possibly do it now.

But instead he asked, "Who's that on your desk?"

You didn't even need to look down to remember whose file you'd opened. You slapped a vinyl down on top of it and muttered, "Nobody."

You expected him to go further with that, but he didn't. You guessed that he'd already seen it. Damn. The *one time* you'd been less than furtive with that case file, *he* had to walk in and judge you for it!

"Did you come in here just to taunt me?" you demanded. Even you, who dealt with the worst lot of London every day, were getting frustrated. No matter how often you tried to be nice to Sherlock Holmes, he never stopped looking at you like he hated you.

"Actually, no," he replied evenly. "Do you think that's all I do?"

"Well…no." Great. Now you felt like an asshole.

"You live by yourself, don't you?"

"I think we've already established that."

"So therefore you must eat by yourself, as evidenced by your recent weight gain–"

"*Sherlock*--"

"–which, might I add, is neither drastic nor unappealing, but at the same time it is indicative that you are forced to eat every serving that you make."

"Well, of course. Who else is going to?"

"Hm." He was staring at your desk. If he said one damned bad word about your Puccini then you would defy gravity to kick him in the face. But he only said, "Dinner."

"I do like dinner," you replied, not sure where he was going with this.

"Wonderful." There was that insincere smile of his again. "You must feel awful when you have to eat out and you're forced to sit by yourself."

"I have friends, you know."

"Hardly ever with a date, correct? By yourself, really, with people watching you and wondering–"

"Now you're just being a bully–"

"I'm well aware of the feeling, might I add. Of course, I could care less about what others think. But you care about what others think, don't you? You don't like it when they think they're gossiping about you–you get stressed when you hear someone say your name in a conversation."

"Ah, really?" Part of you wanted to blast some Stravinsky so that you didn't have to hear another insult, but at the same time you really were interested in this. Compared to what you were used to, this was constructive criticism. "And just how are you so sure of that?"

"It's rather obvious, I should think. Stress can easily be read on a person's face. I find it rather peculiar that you entered a profession in which you'd have to interview reluctant criminals, and you seem to do your job with a respectable degree of competence, yet you become physically anxious whenever a co-worker is having problems with you. That's something you should probably get over."

"Yes, yes, Sherlock Holmes the honey badger. I'm incredibly jealous of your lack of concern. How did we get to this from talking about dinner, again?"

"Be patient, I'm getting to that. I need to be accompanied for my current case. Important business to attend to, and all that."

"Well, all right…wait, what? You don't normally need anyone else's help."

"Yes, that's true. I'd rather not have an idiot working with me, which is a shame, because they seem in such generous supply around here. But you wouldn't need to do much. You would only have to eat a dinner. I'd even pay for you. That's not so hard, is it? I'm sure that even you could manage it."

You opened your mouth and closed it. You resisted turning around to look over shoulder, but you still pointed at yourself, as if unsure, and asked, "Wait, *me*?"

"Unless you believe me to be talking to your potted plant."

"But, um…why me? There must be some officer you could take with you, right?"

"It might be a tad less conspicuous if I was accompanied by a woman," Sherlock told you, and you wondered if you'd miraculously turned the tables on him, because now he seemed unusually tense. Not obvious, oh no, Sherlock Holmes was never *obvious*--but he had stopped looking at you. "The restaurant in question has a ridiculous reputation as some lovey-dovey couple's restaurant."

"Oh." You covered your face with your hands. "*Oh.*"

"Tedious, really. Regardless, it wouldn't take too much of your time. You *will* do it, won't you?"

Your head was spinning, but you managed to say, "I mean, yes, of course, if you really do need the help, yes, of course…"

"Perfect." He handed you the address. "7:00, then. And do try to wear something decent. Afternoon."

As he left you had the feeling that you had just been tricked, despite the fact that he'd told you basically everything. Right. You were going to pose as his date so he could finish some business. That was reasonable enough. You could handle that. Free food was always okay.

And she would be upset because–you were on a date with Sherlock Holmes. Sort of. Not really. Nobody would be excited at *that* prospect, of having to spend time with someone in a romantic atmosphere when the other person has made it clear that they don't care for you at all. You certainly shouldn't have been excited, right? You weren't entirely. You weren't sure what you were feeling. So you played your opera music, but despite the fact that you didn't know a damned word of what they were saying, you found it easier to understand than what you were thinking at that moment.

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## Chapter 7: Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix

**Author's Notes:** So I guess that there's some plot in here and *omfg this lady and Sherlock are all jumpy when someone looks at the other one calm the fuck down* and I need to get these done faster or maybe stop making them so fucking long because I've got a lot of ideas to go through **who cares because Jawn is in the next chapter ~*~hooray~*~**

i don't ship johnlock (i think that's why i'm excommunicated from the fandom) but omfg those two are my brotp it's like i just want to adopt them my babiessss and yeah i have to write the john x sherlock x rea-tan dynamic but i'm actually looking forward to it

---

Only after that conversation did you realize that you had to go on a date with Sherlock Holmes, which led to a second realization: that you had to go on a *date*.

You were having a panic attack. What the hell is a *date*, anyway? It had been ages since you'd gone on a proper date. What was expected of you? What were the proper procedures for this sort of thing? What were the rules? The checklist you had to go through? You were about to look it up on the Internet, but you knew that as soon as you did, Sherlock would pick you apart. "Your heels match your jacket. Just who are you trying to impress?"

So you did what Sherlock asked and dressed decently. You might have even looked *pretty*. But your cat wasn't exactly the best judge of appearance. Still, you gave yourself the benefit of the doubt.

You arrived at the restaurant at 7:07, which to some people might have been a little late, but you were proud of yourself for being so early. Had this been your ex-boyfriend from Sussex, you would have thought 7:54 to be appropriately on-time.

After sliding past the snide-looking host, you located your Sherlock and planted yourself in the seat opposite him. He looked you over and you weren't quite sure *why*, so you looked down at yourself and tried to cut him off.

"I know what you're thinking. Let's see–I must look strained. Nervous about tonight. My make-up's done rather poorly due to my rush to get out the door, and this--*butterfly necklace* is sort of askew, which might be indicative about my reluctance to be here but you already know that I'm a tardy sort of person. I have cuts on my arm because my cat scratched me and I'm trying to cover them up but I'm failing because you can see the bandages through the sleeves. And–dammit, are those buttons *still* not right? Yes, yes, you're giving me that look. You told me to look nice and I look as terrible as I usually do, so don't be mean."

"I wouldn't say that."

"And what *would* you say?"

"I would say that you looked rather lovely."

A pregnant pause. "I *see*. You're experimenting with being nice."

"Well, true. And if I wanted to be *mean* then I wouldn't have stopped where you did."

You smiled. "Then I'm sorry I disappointed you, Mr. Holmes."

"Oh, no, you didn't. I actually thought things would go very differently."

"And how's that? You thought this whole deal would be better, or worse?"

"Nonexistent."

You stared at him and were struck with the sudden urge to lean across the table and mess with all of his curls. But you weren't sure that was proper date behavior so you hid your embarrassingly happy face behind a menu.

Seeing as how you didn't have much of a precedent for date, you did what you thought normal people did on these sorts of events. Only later did you realize that you'd done everything wrong. You ordered food you wanted, regardless of whether or not it was finger food or noodles or whatever and made it apparent that you didn't care for dieting. You told him that you didn't usually do this thing–he told you that he didn't bother with women at all. You talked about your past relationships, which were pathetically few and uneventful, which led into a discussion about money and politics. And, of course, neither of you could keep off of your two favorite topics: *crime* and *making fun of other people.*

Meanwhile, you were scoping the place out, trying to figure out just what Sherlock Holmes was trying to investigate. Maybe the chef was using human meat in his meals! (You avoided that food, to be safe) Or maybe that waitress over there was a serial killer! Maybe the old psychic sitting in the corner booth was someone he needed to interrogate! You glanced at him occasionally, trying to figure out just what he was watching, but the answer was all the same: he was watching you.

"That's the third time the waiter has touched you since you've sat down," Sherlock observed apathetically. "Isn't it about time you became uncomfortable?"

"I'm too busy focusing on the fifty-something woman across the room who is trying to get your attention by adjusting her bra. I was wondering when you intended to react. I think you might like her–she looks loaded." You looked around the place awkwardly. "Uh, *everyone* here looks loaded. Just how did you get a reservation here?"

"Talking over the phone isn't as challenging of a concept as you'd believe. Maybe this will inspire you to plug the phone in your office back in."

"Some people aren't born with cute phone voices…"

You waited five minutes and then excused yourself to go to the restroom. While in there, you dialed the number of the restaurant and waited.

"Hello?" an impatient voice answered.

"I'm looking to place a reservation," you said in your most elegant, pompous voice.

"Of course, sir–"

"I'm a *lady*–"

"We have an opening two months from today," he informed you. "Is this acceptable?"

"Oh, my." Your heart was thumping oddly. "Is the wait regularly so long?"

"I'm afraid so, ma'am," he replied with smug pride. "That's why it's important to not wait to get a reservation. So can I put you down for–"

"Whoops, sorry. My, uh, husband just got us down for…" You struggled to remember something, anything, from your French class in secondary school. "…for *Les Mangeurs de Merde*. So sorry. Good-bye."

You hung up and made it back to your table, suppressing any sort of pleased expression with every fiber of your being.

“So, Sherlock,” you said casually, “when did this case of yours come up?”

You wished you knew just what was indicative of him getting caught off-guard. He chewed his meal carefully and replied, “Just a couple of days ago. It doesn’t really matter. Why?”

“Just wondering, really.”

You wondered just why people avoided Sherlock Holmes so much. Besides the obvious, he wasn’t really that bad. It was probably because you were by now well acquainted with your flaws, and didn’t care if they were reiterated or not… Not to mention that you often felt physically ill from being around people with shallow thinking. You could never talk to them about anything, *anything*! They never had an opinion on anything that wasn't fashion or the weather, and when you tried talking about what you were interested in, suddenly they wanted the conversation to end. How could you *not* want to talk about the serial killers? How could you *not* want to discuss how boring certain criminals are? What, were you *not* supposed to talk about them like they were regular people? Which they were, technically. How was it appropriate to discuss sports stars and their strengths and weaknesses like it was socially acceptable, but as soon as you critically analyzed a child killer, *you* were in the wrong? Whatever! At least you didn’t have to give it up anymore.

So dinner ended quite well, despite the fact that the average woman would have bribed to get out of your position. But, then again, most people didn’t want to hang around Sherlock Holmes and most people didn’t want to hang around you. So it all worked out in the end, sort of, kind of.

“Why are we leaving, though?” you asked, still a little confused. “What about that important business you had to attend to?”

“I’ve already finished it.”

“Well, what was it?”

“Oh, don’t play games. That’s annoying. You know what it was about.”

“No, I don’t. What, then?”

“You.”

You didn’t need to ask him anything else.

Unfortunately, he was not the only one you’d see on your night out. You’d been walking behind him on the narrow street when he felt you push him forward in a panic, as if he needed to hurry and flee. Your face was an open book when he turned to look at you–pupils dilated, gooseflesh, your fingers locked in an iron grip around his sleeve. You were staring off behind you, across the street, but in the one second it took him to look up, there was no one there. Or had anyone been there at all?

“Um,” you said in a tremulous voice, “I think I’d better go home now. I mean, I was going home anyway, right? So I’d better hurry home.”

“If you insist.”

You disappeared into the dark, and for a moment he thought you’d vanished entirely, which worked for you. He was turned away from you and therefore couldn't deflect you, and you ran back to him like a woman forgetting her keys to reach up and press a firm kiss to his cheek.

“That really was nice,” you explained hurriedly, before you fled once more. “I mean, that really *was* nice. I mean it. And I think you should attend to that sort of business more often. I’d like it. I’d like it a lot.”

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## Chapter 8: Sì, mi chiamano Mimì

**Author's Notes:** I work today, ughuu
if only I could start a random drug bust

In your own opinion, you thought that your first meeting with John Watson went horribly. He would disagree. After meeting Sherlock Holmes, you were so normal that he might have even asked you out. *That* would have been something, but looking back, you knew that if he had, then Sherlock would have ended up with a dead roommate by the end of the week.

You met him somewhere in the middle of what you dubbed “that big old suicide case.” To your credit, your blouse was buttoned up correctly for the first time in weeks, and you didn’t meet him while standing over a dead body. It was a slightly less awkward position–you met him in the impromptu drugs bust party that happened down at Baker Street.

“…and why are *you* here?” he’d heard Sherlock demand.

“You can’t blame me for it,” was your reply, and the first fucking thing John Watson had ever heard you say. “I’ve been bored all week. There’s no criminal intent in suicides and only now is anyone thinking that there is.”

It was a lie to say that you *weren’t* stealing things from Sherlock’s flat under the assumption that he wouldn’t miss them since the place was messy enough anyway. Lestrade probably noticed that you were stuffing random objects into your bag, but it sorted of amused him, so he didn’t say anything. Meanwhile, you were furiously humming “El Toreador,” trying to slide around Sherlock to get to the pillow that you’d been eyeing when you ran into John.

“Hello there!” you exclaimed immediately. “You must be John Watson. I’ve heard about you!”

“Oh, really?” he asked, not sure whether or not that was a good thing. “And how’s that? I mean, I haven’t been around that long.”

“Ah, well, information travels pretty fast.”

“It’s just…it’s been, what, a couple of days?”

You smiled. “It travels *very* fast…”

In his opinion, you were really quite pretty, which was why he initially thought that you had nothing to do with Sherlock. And in your opinion, he was far too nice to be with Sherlock. He reminded you a little of a hedgehog and he endeared to you so much that you immediately wanted to adopt him. You shook his hand eagerly and introduced yourself.

When Sherlock had left to do…something (certainly not get himself into mortal danger), you were briefly alone with John Watson. He’d already had a talk with Sherlock about women and he knew that he didn’t seem to like them and they weren’t so big on him, so he didn’t think much about it. He was actually wondering how to get your number without seeming too forward.

“So, I hear you’re flatmates with Sherlock,” you said. “How’s that working out for you?”

“It’s uh, it’s…” John searched for an adjective and couldn’t find an appropriate one, so he moved on. “And how do you know him? You work with him?”

“Yes, from time to time. No reason why, really, since I’m pretty obsolete compared to him, eh?”

You thought back to spending time with Sherlock Holmes. It wasn’t until the third time he asked you that he actually called it a “date,” and even then he was incapable of acting like you were anything more than a diversion. But then again, if you ignored him for too long, he came by to bother you on the pretense of needing to correct your work, so it wasn’t too bad.

You scratched the back of your neck. “I don’t know. I guess I’m his friend.”

“Oh! Well…not his…*girl*friend, or anything like that?”

You’d been holding the pillow you’d meant to steal at the time. It was a good thing that it had ended up in your hands, for anything else would have splintered in your grip.

And you said: “My! That’s a sudden thing to say, isn’t it?”

“I’m not trying to imply anything,” John continued hurriedly, wondering if you’d taken offense. “I just talked with him–he said that, ehm, girlfriends weren’t his…area…? Seemed to think that they were boring.”

Your smile was as sudden as breaking glass. “He said that, didn’t he? Well! If he said it, then it must be right. Right…?”

You excused yourself and left abruptly. John Watson watched you leave, not sure if he’d said something wrong–since all he said was the *truth*. And he wasn’t wrong. Girlfriends weren’t Sherlock Holmes’s area. Not yet.

And for your benefit he decided to hold off on asking you out for a while.

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## Chapter 9: Dunque io son…tu non m'inganni?

**Author's Notes:** Gettin' real tired of your bullshit Sherlock ~~except once Irene Adler rolls around you might actually have to work with your woman through your problems UGH BUT THE DRAMA WILL BE SO INTERESTING~~

ffs this next chapter (I'm writing as you read this)
it's just
i can't even

This had never happened before. This wasn’t supposed to happen. This was another “anti-acceptable” event that took up unnecessary time and space in Sherlock Holmes’s head.

Not about the cabbie, mind you. Oh, he’d mostly forgotten about that occasion, anyway. Not about Moriarty, or whoever the hell that was. No. Not that. What was bothering him was…*you were avoiding him.*

Seriously, what the hell? Who did you think you were? *Him*? You couldn’t avoid people just because you wanted to, especially not *him*. This was an outrage. And totally different from the time when he was trying to avoid you, because you were actually succeeding.

It’s not like you had a reason to avoid him. Right? It’s not like he kept a goddamn record of his injustices on other people, mostly since a list like that would be a mile long. But he was fairly certain that he hadn’t said anything *too* offensive to you. Again, though, he was *fairly* certain. So he didn’t assume that you were avoiding him because you looked like you were avoiding *everyone*.

You kept to your office and locked the door, even while talking to dangerous criminals. When you were alone, you made sure to fill every inch of your room with opera music so that you couldn’t hear anyone bitching and knocking. You stayed in your office until it was time to go home, and of course he couldn’t be bothered to wait outside your door all day just to see you.

“Open the door,” he called to you after a week of your evasion.

You were playing some opera, and after a moment you called back, “Maybe you’re not fluent in Italian, Sherlock, so I’ll translate this song for you. It can get a little hard to understand, but they’re actually saying ‘*Fuck off, I don’t want to talk to you.*’”

At first, he was resolute. Why should he care if you were being all womanly and refusing to talk to him without saying why? That was none of his business. It shouldn’t be his business. He wasn’t even interested, really, except once more he was afflicted with thinking of you when he shouldn’t be. He was actually…*concerned*. Minimally concerned, I mean. I mean that the smallest fraction of him was concerned about why you were upset. But it was a fraction and I guess there was something to be said for that.

So he managed to catch you. He lay in wait, I mean. He actually took time out of his day to wait for you to come back for lunch so that he could storm the gates of your office and close it behind him so that it was just the two of you.

Immediately, you battered at him as if you were trying to get rid of a stray cat. “Go away!”

“You’re being childish,” he accused.

“No, I’m acting like a *person*,” you shot back. “I know this must be news to you, Sherlock, so you might want to store it away in your little library of knowledge. People don’t like it when you fuck with their feelings.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

You gave him a look of utter disbelief. “Are you really a detective? I mean, seriously? I’ve watched you manipulate people pretty well. I’m beginning to believe that you don’t actually have any idea what you’re doing.”

“You actually believe that I’m *manipulating* you?”

“Of course not. You only do that when you want something out of it, right? You just don’t care.”

You knew that you weren’t being fair, but you didn’t really care. Being caring and understanding had never really paid off in your life. Your ex from Sussex, your short-lived romance from Wales, every criminal and co-worker–you had played nice and gotten hell for it. It hadn’t really mattered back then, back when you didn’t really care. But now you *did* care, and you were immediately reminded why you had stopped actually caring about other people. Sure, you might have asked for it, getting in too deep with Sherlock Holmes. But you thought that you’d known him for long enough that you wouldn’t be fazed by this.

He was just staring at you now, and you weren’t sure if you’d actually gotten to him, or if he was silently agreeing with you. So you exclaimed, “And what of it! What does the great Sherlock Holmes care if anyone’s upset with him? I don’t see what the matter is. Since when do you care what anyone thinks?”

“You’re right, I don’t care what other people think, because other people don’t matter to me.”

He had said it–he had disarmed you. You opened your mouth and closed it–searching for a retort, some sort of aggressive defense–none found. So he continued impatiently.

“Even if you hated me I suppose it wouldn’t make that big of a difference. You would probably make quite a few friends that way. But if you were going to, you might as well be polite and tell me why.”

“I don’t *hate* you,” you replied, stiff and almost offended. “But it would be nice for me to know that you weren’t interested at all.”

“I’m not *interested*? I don’t recall saying this. Enlighten me, when did I *say* that?”

He actually looked pretty pissed off, so, dumbfounded, you said, “John Watson told me…he said that you weren’t interested in girlfriends…or women in general. Something about your…’area.’”

“Hm.” He leaned back. “I guess that *would* explain it.”

“So you *did* say that. Look, Sherlock, I get it. But when you asked me out to that restaurant seven months ago–“

“Eight–“

“Okay, *eight*, you could have at least told me that you weren’t going to feel any differently about me. If you’re married to your work, it wouldn’t bother me.”

“Very well, then. I don’t feel anything for you and I probably never will.”

You were absolutely stricken by him coming out and saying it. B-But! But what about...? And...? It coudn't be! And you...! Well, then–in that case–if that was the truth, then–you just said that you could deal with it, you said that it wouldn’t bother you and you supposed that you would have to keep up that lie–

“There you have it,” he said matter-of-factly. “Every inch of your body reads absolute depression.”

“Wait–what?”

“Caring about people really is a disadvantage, isn’t it? If rape, robbery and murder doesn’t bother you, and this does, then that really is a problem. But you obviously can't pretend like you don't care."

“Sherlock–“

“I mean, honestly, do you people care that much about labels?” He inspected you closely. “Would it really make you happy if you were able to refer to yourself as my *girlfriend*?”

He made the idea sound so stupid, yes–he probably thought that it was stupid, yes, he wanted you to think that notion was stupid. But you were sick of it all so you just threw your hands up and said, “Yes! Yes, actually! Yes, Sherlock, you actually have no *idea* how much I want to be your girlfriend, except, in your opinion, girlfriends are dull and *not your area*.”

“Hm.” He seemed to mull this over. “You’re right, I did say that. And it’s true. But I would say that you’re never dull, so obviously I need some more research on that front.”

And then, after all that effort he made to get into your office, he opened the door and let himself out.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” he went on as you stared dumbfounded. “Afternoon.”

And once more, Sherlock Holmes had moved you to speechlessness. Was he going to do this to you *all* the time? You had been upset with him and he had simply walked in, screwed around with your head and walked out with his dominance asserted. One of these days you had to win against him, but when? And did he really even *want* to date you?

The answer was: No, of course not. Sherlock Holmes wasn’t interested in dating you at all. He’d assumed that he’d already been dating you for the last eight months, or, at least, that’s what he thought people did when they were dating. He was mentally past that stage... It was so tedious to refer to someone as *my girlfriend.* It would be far, far easier for him to refer to you as *my wife.*

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## Chapter 10: Yamadori, ancor le pene...

**Author's Notes:** I DEDICATE THIS TO MY HUSBAND BECAUSE IT'S HER BIRTHDAY AND I CAN'T EVEN

~~Sherlock you're a *twat* I can already see you being a dick and correcting Watson all the fucking time.~~
~~"I'm not her boyfriend I'm her *man* get it right"~~

---

John Watson saw you frequently after that day. He was never sure *what* you were doing with Sherlock, and he wasn't sure if he *wanted* to know.

Whenever he saw you, you were leaving the room. That, or you elected to leave whenever he arrived. John was at least fairly certain that you didn't hate him or anything–you were were always smiling and friendly to him, at least–but you were nevertheless reluctant to stay in the same room as him and Sherlock. And why? Were the two of you plotting something? Conspiring? Good Christ, did he *want* to know? You seemed like such a lovely woman, but after all he'd experienced in his short time of being the flatmate to Sherlock Holmes, he knew that nothing was ever quite ordinary. Occasionally he wondered if you were an undercover serial killer. (He was halfway there, honestly–at least, you were too trigger-happy for your own good)

He walked into the lab to nearly bump into you as you walked out. As usual you smiled cheerfully and said, "H*ello*" before looking him up and down for a moment before departing.

John watched you go and turned back to Sherlock. Not quite sure how to approach the subject, he said, "Uh, you two seem quite...close."

"Do we?" Sherlock was staring through the microscope.

"So are you and her...?" John trailed off, gesturing vaguely.

He looked up. "Are we what?"

"I mean, you know..." He cleared his throat. "I'm not judging you or anything. She's quite pretty."

"You think she's pretty." Sherlock paused. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Oh, no, not that. I just mean..." Wait, what *did* he mean? "I just mean *that*, actually. Just stating a fact."

Sherlock watched him carefully for a long while before turning back to whatever was under the microscope. John expected something like "I hadn't noticed" or "I don't *care*" but instead received, "Hm, yes. She is."

He tried again. "So is she your...?"

"My *what*, John?"

"You know, your...your girlfriend."

John didn't see how it could be true. Less than a month ago Sherlock Holmes had told him that he found girlfriends dull and hopelessly "normal." More than that, what woman would honestly pursue Sherlock Holmes? He and the female sex didn't seem to have any mutual feelings of good will.

Sherlock stared at him once more. "May I ask how you came to that conclusion?"

"I'm not judging," he repeated, "but, well...she spends a lot of time with you."

"True."

"You like her, don't you?"

"Very observant of you, John. Have you been practicing?"

"So," he finished rather lamely, "I just came to that conclusion. What, am I wrong?"

"She's whatever she calls herself," Sherlock replied unhelpfully.

"So what do *you* call yourself?"

"Like what?"

"Are you..." John fell back to gesturing again. "Her boyfriend?"

Sherlock sighed and turned back to his work. "You're quite wrong."

Wait, so–what?

"I think I'm missing something here."

"John, boyfriends belong to cloying schoolgirls and divorced housewives looking to redeem their youth. She is neither of them."

John exhaled sharply. He was getting somewhere, right? He wasn't really sure. Still, he knew it was his own fault for assuming that you and Sherlock could be anything approaching "normal."

"So what does that make you?"

"Hm." Sherlock pondered this for just a moment before answering cryptically: "Auditioning for the main role."

John opened his mouth, preparing to question that remark, and then closed it. That was probably the best answer he could expect, and he'd do well to accept it.

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### Chapter 11: Quando me'n vo'

**Author's Notes:** this isn't long because *Parade's End*

and btw here's a pointless story so move past it if you want, but: I like giving my characters birthdays, I feel it characterizes them a bit (even though it doesn't). I'm somewhat obsessed with holiday birthdays as well as birthdays from December-January-February. I never gave Ingrid a birthday so I thought her and this Rea-tan could have a birthday at New Year's or Christmas, but that's when ASIB happens and besides, Sherlock's birthday is January 6th. So I thought April Fool's, but that's John Watson's birthday...so next it would be the birthday of an opera composer, to go with the theme, and of course I thought Bach, one of the greats...except he was born on March 31st, the birthday John Watson's parents gave him so he wouldn't be an April Fool baby. Mozart and Puccini both have January/December birthdays...so maybe it'll just be on Halloween, or Stravinsky's birthday...but Puccini is her favorite, so I don't see why it can't be December 22nd... [/pointless rant over]

---

Just what did Sherlock Holmes think of you--?

It was a little complicated.

He had agreed to be ~~your boyfriend~~ your man, although with him being Sherlock Holmes, he was still grasping what that concept actually meant. He had seen plenty of girlfriends and observed how they acted, yet so far you were determined to act against the prototype. You were not yet troubled with his incompetence at affection and you did not lower yourself to infantile coquetries. You did not even cry when he didn't text you for a while–rather, you hardly seemed to notice, and if anyone pointed that fact out, you would be genuinely surprised.

"Really?" you would cry. "Oh, my God! I've been so busy that I've forgotten about him…"

It was true that you trusted him, but occasionally even you wondered how he felt about you. One could only go for so long without desiring some sort of intimate reciprocation. That, and you were downright insulted that Sherlock Holmes felt the need to stand there looking as he always did yet you never had any opportunity to kiss him. Life was like that.

But just what did Sherlock Holmes think about you, anyway?

Quite simply, he was not the sort of person do delve into the quest of introspection. Believe me, he tried. And the results were not very… *accurate.*

"Oh, Sherlock!" It was you, jogging up to meet him.

*Chest discomfort. Pain.* An uncomfortable throbbing of the heart as soon as you said his name. His chest tightened as if his ribs were trying to crush his internal organs–

"It's good to see you again," you said, a smile spreading onto your face as you leaned in close to him. "How's the case going?"

"Um," he said, "it's fine."

The pain leaked down to his stomach now. *Pain spreading down to the abdominal area.*

"That's good to hear. Hey–when you see John next, could you give him this for me? Only awful people don't give books back."

You thrust a book in his stomach. It was a small, thick paperback, its spine bent and pages dog-eared, evidently one of the two or three books that John Watson read regularly. He was obliged to take it, and when he reached out to accept it your fingers brushed against his.

Good Christ. His breath shortened imperceptibly, and he was getting a bit dizzy staring down at you. If he moved forward too much, he might accidentally fall into those ridiculously large, vibrant eyes of yours.

"Wow! I'm sorry!" you apologized immediately, moving back as if you'd been shocked. "I must be in your thinking space, right? I won't bother you. I'll go now. Don't kill John, all right?"

You were only half-teasing, really. You reached up to press a kiss to his cheek, but he was so tall that you tended to just stop your efforts at his jawline.

*A sudden break into a cold sweat, prominently on the palms. Skin cool and clammy.*

You hurried off to leave him by himself, which annoyed him thoroughly because if he had the choice, he would not let you out of his sight for fear of you getting yourself into his kind of trouble. But at the same time, he stared after you, not quite understanding and, in the purest sense, not "getting it."

So what did Sherlock Holmes think of you?

Well–really, he feared that you were giving him a *heart attack.*

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### Chapter 12: Dove sono i bei momenti

**Author's Notes:** soon I'll go back to the main Sherlock arc, which goes through the story's own arc, and just
damn
irene's arc will be the longest because *just think about it*

i don't care if none of you listen I AM ADDICTED TO MAKING MIXES

---

Aside from John Watson, who had asked, no one actually knew that you were dating Sherlock Holmes. You didn't really blame them for this. The two of you weren't a conspicuous couple, really… You would never skip merrily down the street hand-in-hand with him singing silly love songs. You might, if you drugged him up enough, but it wasn't in the foreseeable future.

Occasionally, you did want to get affectionate with him, but how would you broach that subject? It's not like he was the type of man you could walk up to, shove onto a couch, and–*cuddle.* You actually wondered if he was allergic to physical intimacy.

You managed to almost catch him, once–he was in your office, clearly using you to further an investigation. And you were delighted to cut him off in the act.

"You're not getting the papers on Patterson," you told him calmly, the papers held tightly in your grip behind your back. "It's completely against regulations, and you have zero evidence for it."

"If you're competent enough for your job, you'd know that that the man is clearly suffering from a pathetic Freudian excuse," Sherlock replied impatiently, now and again reaching out for the files, but you purposely held them so close to your ass that he didn't want to tempt fate.

"That's none of your business."

"It's going to *prove* that he killed his mother," in an attempt to appeal to your sympathetic side.

"You try to sound sincere about being concerned." You moved out of his reach again. "Aren't you the brilliant one, between the two of us? You shouldn't need *proof* at all."

"The fact that he's wearing his deceased mother's perfume is all the reason I need, and I know he's cross-dressing by the makeup he's failed to wipe off and his careful removal of body hair, but unless I know *where* he works, I can blackmail him into–"

"There's nothing of that sort in here!"

"Oh, really? The way you held it closer to you tells me otherwise."

If you remembered correctly, there were actually photos in his file of him working as a drag queen, which was why you were even more reluctant to show Sherlock anything.

"It's a conflict of interest," you explained. "I can't give you files on everyone just because we're dating. You should be ashamed. It's like you're using a shortcut. *Using* me!"

"You're not a dramatic."

"True, but it's pretty entertaining to try it once in a while."

Sherlock reached behind you once more, but as soon as you shifted to keep the papers away from him, he deftly read your movements and snatched them right out of your hands from the other side.

"There," he said, his face smug. "You can tell the others that I took them from you by force."

"Give those back!" you cried, genuinely upset now. "I'm not going to get fired because I'm passing around everyone's file for you and your–your *schemes*…"

Sherlock only had to hold them above your head to keep them out of your reach–no skill was required. You jumped and strained and pounded on his chest, to no avail. You didn't realize until later that you were leaning on him to get your hands on the file, and he was enjoying your tribulations as a result… Well, still more so because you still hadn't managed to win against him.

At last you turned your gaze from the file onto him, and now you realized just how close the two of you were. This was a first, a good first, a first you could deal with–

And you decided, yes, *yes*, you would do it… No one was around, you were in private, no shame, no prying eyes, and he had nowhere to run so there was nothing stopping you from kissing him, and you would, you would and–

Someone would knock on the door.

"Are you in there?" Lestrade called in, and you froze.

"Y-Yes," you replied, your hesitant voice inching its way around Sherlock to reach your boss.

"I just wanted to let you know, if Sherlock needs anything on that Patterson case, go ahead and give it to him."

Sherlock's smirk was so fucking victorious. You twitched.

"Sure thing," you managed to say through gritted teeth. "Absolutely."

Soon, then.

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# Chapter 13: Bacia per me la mano

**Author's Notes:** sherlock you're just a big dumb asshole
i think that sums this chapter up nicely
tl;dr: sherlock is a big dumb asshole

---

Finally, finally! A case even Sherlock Holmes would struggle with… A case that you could best him on! Yes! It was, finally, *a crime of passion*!

It's not that Sherlock didn't understand *why* people killed each other for such reasons. The problem was that he tried to rationalize in a situation when that sort of thing was impossible.

"I don't see what you're making a face for," you rebuked. "It's not even hard to understand."

"He was a serial adulterer, that's obvious enough by the varieties of perfume on him and the fact that he's hardly worn his ring. But it's already been proven that he hasn't had sex with *her.*"

The "*her*" came along with a furious wave at the bathtub, where the second murder victim had rested. Mr. Robins was lying in the doorway, but his (virginal) mistress had already been exhumed from her literal bloodbath. You folded your arms and looked from Robins to Sherlock impassively.

"It's probably just the straw that broke the camel's back," you said. "The lady of the house must have known that her husband was a scoundrel. She walks in, sees them kissing, kills 'em and shoots herself in the head."

You gingerly stepped over the body of Mr. Robins and crossed over to the bedroom, where Mrs. Robins was here, and there.

"You know, most women don't kill themselves through shooting," you told him, "but I guess that was the most accessible option at the time, eh?"

You paused for a long while, and turned to look at him.

"You know, this isn't a case or anything… It's sort of run-of-the-mill," you remarked, glancing at him with a bit of suspicion. "There's nothing for you to do here."

"That's right."

"Then why are you here? I mean, you must just be wasting your time, right?"

"No," but he didn't add on his usual asshole remark, so your suspicion increased.

"Don't you have some sort of important intellectual discovery to make, or something? I'm not trying to get rid of you, but I'm sure that you could be somewhere more exciting."

"John's at a girlfriend's house," he said, "and you're right here. There's nothing else to do."

You smiled. "I'm second to John? That hurts, Sherlock. Right here."

"The heart is on the other side of the chest."

"…I knew that." You slid your finger over to the other side. "Look, you don't have to be here if you don't want to."

"Why would I force myself to be *anywhere*?"

"I don't see why else you'd be here otherwise."

"I told you why already," he went on impatiently. "That's the only reason I'm putting up with such a pathetic soap opera."

"Aww, you don't have to be so cynical," you replied cheerfully as you bent closer to stare at Mrs. Robins's brains splattered across the headboard. "If you found me kissing another man, what would you do about it?"

Sherlock twitched. He recalled Mr. Adam Coveney, the Scotland Yard worker who lusted over unattainable women and who had most recently turned his attention onto you. You didn't know or care about it, but even so, Sherlock had the strong urge to push him down the stairs whenever he saw him.

But he said evenly, "I would find out everything about him, figure out why you were unhappy, determine your feelings for him for whether or not you were trying to elicit a reaction, and then move on from there."

"Huh… If this were an opera, you could probably kill him and then it'd be all romantic. Kisses are very important, you know…"

You were staring up at the ceiling thoughtfully, absentmindedly adjusting your butterfly necklace as you pondered the possibilities. Sherlock passed you, pretending to be careless and nonchalant as he examined the body of Mrs. Robins once more.

"I have an idea," he said.

"An idea? About what?" You spun around towards him. Was there some plot twist in this case that you'd never even guessed?

Sherlock was looking at the same brain splatter you'd been examining just a moment ago. "You're here. Close your eyes."

"Close my eyes?" You bristled, immediately not liking this idea. "Whatever for?"

"Just do it."

Oh, God. You shut your eyes tight and prayed for the best. He was planning something vicious and you knew it–you could see it in his eyes. What of it? Was it like that one "big super banking case" where the victim "shot himself" using the wrong hand? Ooh! Was there a development? Was he calculating brain splatter and trajectory? Or were you making it too obvious that you were in his thinking space? He'd told you once that you distracted him by looking at him, and regardless of the fact–

You would have finished that thought, but those things had a way of falling out of your head when Sherlock took your face in his hands and leaned down to wed your lips to his. He liked the way you tensed up just the slightest before relaxing immediately–ah, was that new chapstick you were using? A good explanation of why it was so soft, and…

He sighed and moved over from your mouth to your cheek and pressed a soft kiss to it.

"Hmm," he said, his deep voice rattling through your bones, "no. You're still wrong. Nice, I'll admit. But that's nothing to kill a man over. You people really do overreact, don't you?"

Before he had time to straighten, you glared up at him and grabbed his scarf.

"You still have work to do, then," you replied through gritted teeth. "I promise it's not too disappointing."

You brought him down again to take his mouth with yours–hungry, demanding, impatient. Honestly, you didn't expect Sherlock Holmes to know how to French, but there's little experience needed when neither of you are even thinking properly. You tasted like mints–the free samples on the desk from Scotland Yard?–and you were just glad that he didn't taste like a goddamn smoker. He treated your being like he would a case–exploring every inch of your mouth, figuring out what made your pulse quicken, what made you moan into him, what made your fingers tighten around his sleeve. And you knew that he was not a serial kisser, and he was well aware of the fact as well, but he'd never been quite interested in the subject until your faint perfume was close enough to touch.

Oh, wait, wait–neither of you had noticed that you were being pushed back and forth against the bedroom door. I'm not going to blame you, or anything. This was the first time Sherlock Holmes had ever been mildly interested in carnality and you were getting what you'd been waiting a long while for. But I would like to point out that the world was still turning despite the fact that, between the two of you, it felt that it had stopped underneath your feet.

"Are you in there?" Anderson demanded from somewhere down the hallway.

"Go away," Sherlock managed to say.

"We're doing important business," you supplemented once you'd caught your breath.

"What's that noise, anyway? What are you two freaks up to?"

"Why don't you go talk to Lestrade?" you suggested. "I'm sure he could find something important for you to do."

"Are you two–?" Anderson was pushing on the door now, except your back was to it, and now Sherlock was pressing down on it.

"No," you lied.

"I didn't *say* anything!"

"We're *working*," Sherlock told him impatiently. "Your input is *not* welcome here, so kindly move to some other room, house, or country."

"What are you even talking about? There's nothing to be solved!" Anderson kept trying to get in, and now you leaned your whole weight against the door. Anderson, however, had realized that your voice and Sherlock's sounded much too close to be normal.

"There's a *body* in there!" he squawked. "Just what on Earth are you *doing*?"

"Business!" you repeated.

"But–"

"It's for science, Anderson, can't you understand it? I know it's hard to wrap your tiny brain around, but try to keep up with the rest of us," Sherlock interjected.

"I'm just saying–"

"*Science.*"

"I'm getting Lestrade," Anderson cried, "so whatever you freaks are plotting, you'd better *stop*…"

His footsteps faded into the distance, and you sighed, straightening your blouse with discontent marked on your face.

"I work with a bunch of cockblocks," you bitched.

"Hmm."

"What's that look for?" You smiled a little.

"It's still an idiotic thing to kill for," he told you, "and such emotion is beyond my understanding, although I will continue to hold a strong disdain for it."

"I understand," you replied with a facetious little shrug of the shoulders as you crossed behind him. "Since you wish it, I'll never kiss you again."

"I never said that," he snapped.

You whirled around to face him, a rather cheeky smile on your face as you looked him over. It took him only a moment to realize his error, and immediately tried to make up for it.

“It’s typical for a man to lose himself in such situations, yet I won’t deliberately lower myself to the status of a hormone-addled schoolboy,” he informed you.

“Absolutely.”

You pressed two fingers to your lips, as if to keep them chaste, which seemed to only incense him more.

“*You* do as you please, but it’s my principle to never let silly emotion rule over my head, which is infinitely more important.” You crept closer, and he immediately balked. “Now, that is–“

Amused, you reached up to place a lingering kiss on the edge of his mouth, then to his cheek. Against it, you smiled, and prodded his side.

“Is Sherlock Holmes getting unusually warm to the touch?” you asked innocently. Before he could protest, you added, “or are you simply falling prey to a base physiological reaction of a common man? Honestly, you don’t have to pretend like you’re so indifferent. We’re dating, not strangers.”

You pulled away and strode back over to the bed, looking absolutely inconspicuous in time for Lestrade to open the door and claim that he had assumed that, judging by the way Anderson had looked, you and Sherlock were using Mrs. Robins as a puppet and dangling her out the window for a show to passersby on the street. And you smiled at him and Sherlock had to recalibrate his brain for it to work properly again.

There was a problem, of course. Sherlock was dating you so that he’d stop imagining idealized versions of you. Now, those had been replaced by the real you, which to his distress was equally pleasant and distracting. And for all those years he had looked down on the irritating animals who thought of nothing more than their carnal desires, he was distressed at the realization that he would *not* be distressed at the prospect of kissing you every day for the rest of his life, and what’s more, he even desired it. Just as he desired to touch you again, immediately.

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## Chapter 14: Pari siamo!

**Author's Notes:** so guys, i actually have a lot of shit written and i'm desperately trying to put the fucking plot in here because right now it's fluffy (which is sherlock fluff so it's not fluff by any other standards) but there will be pLOT I SWEAR and one last thing, for the sake of things, Rea-tan's birthday is in February (it'll all make sense later). It could be any number of dates, really. My best friend's birthday is February 1st...there's Valentine's Day and the start of Lent...but I'd like to settle on Handel's birthday at February 23rd. February is just a good month, guys. I was spiritually born in February. It's got the best gemstone and flower and Valentine's Day and it's got snow but it sucks in Michigan but there's Lent and it's shit and...

and I feel like moffat today so I'll say this:
**may 18th, september 3rd, november 12th**

---

When Sherlock had worked on his “Blind Banker” case (that was the name of it, going by Watson’s blog, which you read religiously), you had made sure to stay out of his way. You assumed that he needed a lot of mental room for his deducing and investigating and whatnot, and it relaxed you to know that you weren’t dating a man who needed you to call him every five minutes.

But you overestimated just how much space Sherlock needed, and in return he became fidgety with the lack of *you* around. Initially he thought that he would be a good thing to have acquired a woman who wouldn’t bother him all the time, but he was his own downfall. As soon as you were out of sight, the space around him became more and more apparent until it suffocated him. He was morbidly fascinated by the realization that he had been alone for so many years and perfectly fine with it, and he was adapting too quickly to change.

More than that, he was concerned, or at least as much as Sherlock Holmes could be concerned. You still wouldn’t tell him who it was that bothered you so terribly–that man who lived in the file you kept on your desk, as a sort of reminder that he didn’t understand. He supposed that it wouldn’t be too hard to research, or simply steal, but he was wary at giving you even more of a reason to be angry with him when you were ignoring plenty of opportunities to do just that.

But for now, you were content, sitting in 221B as Sherlock stared at the wall (you presumed he was thinking about *something*). You were not unnerved by silence, and with Sherlock you practically expected it. So you stared at the empty fireplace, and to any observer you looked trapped in some deep and complex thought, while really you had a brief snatch of an aria stuck in your head and you were trying to figure out where it was from.

To complete all of this, John Watson was staring at you. He couldn’t believe you existed–you might be a faerie or a nymph, who appeared out of nowhere and lived in some faraway mystical land. There was no way a woman, *any* woman, could intimately tolerate Sherlock Holmes. What did the two of you talk about in your spare time, anyway? What the hell did you do on dates? Were cases your dates? At first he thought that Sherlock was dating you as a means (although a means for *what* he had no idea), but now it really did seem that it wasn’t true. Whenever you spent too much time away from Sherlock, he spoiled you relentlessly upon your return. That’s not to say that Sherlock spoiled you in any conceivable way that’s common of a man upon his woman, but John had lived with him long enough to see it. He didn’t point out uncomfortable truth about you; he asked you about your day without being ironic; he smiled at you even when you weren’t looking. So he supposed that Sherlock *must* like you for some reason, and it must be mutual.

Your eyes trailed over, and a sudden exclamation escaped you: “Oh, my!”

Sherlock looked up immediately, as if you had unconsciously solved the riddle that had been on his mind. “What is it?”

“Wow! That’s adorable! Where’d you get it?” You sprang up and padded forward to investigate whatever it was that had caught your interest.

John Watson was holding his breath without realizing it. Carefully, you had picked up the lucky cat that had found its niche in the living space of 221B. You were smiling at it as you inspected it, as if you’d stumbled upon a cherished item that was thought to be lost.

Sherlock was also staring at you. He remembered that thing, that little stupid trinket that he’d bought while in the curio shop. He hadn’t even planned on it–he had never been interested in oriental knickknacks, had it not been for what that woman said–

*”You want lucky cat?” she appealed, holding up the ridiculous gold cat, its waving paw not quite matching the vacant expression in its eyes. Sherlock turned to stare at it and was immediately unsettled. Did someone manufacture that, honestly thinking that it conveyed welcome?*

*“No thanks, no,” John replied politely, seeing as how he hadn’t been interested in the twenty other replicas around him.*

*“Ten pound, ten pound!” she insisted, as if it made a difference. And then, as John continued to turn it down: “I think your wife, she will* like*!”*

*Sherlock froze. What? What? Just what did she say? No, no, of course not, how could she guess that, how could she just assume it? She must have been pitching it dramatically, she must have been grabbing at straws… It wasn’t important, of course. John had found the symbol on the label, and that was much more important. Infinitely more important–*

*“Hold on,” Sherlock told him.*

*“What? What?”*

*Sherlock approached the woman behind the counter as a man approaches the gallows.*

*“I’ll take it,” he muttered.*

*“What you want?”*

*“I’ll take it,” he repeated lamely, staring at the wall. “The lucky cat… I’ll take it.”*

*He had considered giving it to you, but then what? There was no occasion, as far as he knew. It was the spring, and your birthday had been in the winter, a month apart from his, which he never asked you about but managed to get it by combining the horoscopes you read in the newspaper and the gemstone that was in your class ring. (And he’d gotten it right!) It was nearly an anniversary of some sort, but Sherlock Holmes couldn’t be bothered to pay attention to those infinitesimal and meaningless increments. More than that, he hadn’t even been sure you’d even like it. The last thing he needed was you holding it over his head that he was terrible with gifts… he had only gotten lucky with your birthday, since he had passed a shop selling used opera vinyl for incredibly little money. You’d practically wanted to mount him for that one, really…*

“You like it?” he asked, his voice oddly dry as he watched you examine the lucky cat.

“Like it? Oh, I *love* it,” you gushed. “When I was a girl, I was determined to collect little cat figurines whenever I travelled... I had a pretty good collection. Never managed to get a lucky cat, though. I always wanted one, too! And you got such a lovely one… Ah! It’s too precious…”

You noticed the way that they were staring at you–unblinking, vacant, almost struck dumb in disbelief, and you immediately misinterpreted it. You replaced the cat and put up hands in defense.

“I mean, um… No, I’m not one of those bitches who come into your place and demand to take everything… I just like it, is all.”

You couldn’t fathom why they were staring at you like that, and you weren’t sure whether or not it was a good thing…

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## Chapter 15: Ah, chi mi dice mai

**Author's Notes:** if i update a lot on wednesday and friday it's because
i have a shitload of time between classes and
i have no friends yet (IT'S MY FIRST DAY) and i literally have nothing to do but write

yeah this was supposed to be a sort of vehicle chapter to up intensity or whatever the fuck but i ended up getting a shit eating grin

---

It was true that, in your relationship, Sherlock Holmes frequently tried to entrap you. You would never claim to be cleverer than that man, but at the same time, you would never *ever* admit to being slow-witted in the least. That would mean that he’d won, and you had learned by now that he was a frequent and rather poor winner.

There was one thing you could hold above his head, if you chose to, and you most definitely did not. You just wished this whole matter would go away. Why did he have to appear now, anyway? Why must that asshole, the one who lived in the file on your desk, decide to come out of the woodwork after so many countless, lovely months of leaving you alone? Probably because he was a psychotic asshole. Oh, wait–by the standards of the legal system, he was a completely innocent and sweet-tempered individual. Bollocks. If the assholes who botched *that* case ran the world, Jack the Ripper would be the poster child for misunderstood dog lovers…

You wouldn’t be surprised if Sherlock Holmes had heard of the dreaded Stanley investigation. Most likely, he could have solved the case (and proved it!) in half the time the fuck-ups you worked with had, except he probably wouldn’t take it in the first place because of how boring it would be for him. That was why you wanted to keep it from him–to hold it out of reach, so to speak. Eventually he would figure out that you were part of the SNAFU and he would probably never let you forget it. You could already feel your competency teeter and totter dangerously in his eyes, and you were reluctant to give him proof that he had reason to not trust you.

He did, however, persist. If you had told him when you first started dating, he probably would have lost interest by now. Now, you refused to tell him out of inertia, and you told yourself that if you’d kept it away from him this long, you could do it for a little while longer.

Once, he asked you, “I really wish you’d tell me who’s bothering you so badly.”

“What?” You stiffened up immediately, glanced over your shoulder, and then shot him an anxious glance. “What do you mean, bothering me? Nobody’s bothering me. Do I look like I’m bothered? Why would you think that I’d be bothered?”

“Am I supposed to think it normal that you glance over your shoulder whenever we step outside?”

“Pfft. Perfectly normal behavior. Women, um, live in a very dangerous environment, especially in cities like this.”

“Then you must have considered the supermarket to be a hostile environment as well?”

“Just forget about it, all right? I don’t want to get into it.”

Sherlock studied you carefully. So far, you didn't seem the type of girl who said "I'm fine" and expected him to delve into a psychoanalysis to find out what was wrong with you. He was more curious than concerned, really, but he didn't really have the charisma to pry, especially with you, who knew all of his methods.

"You do realize that I could very easily figure it out myself."

"If you do, I'll never speak to you again."

"You'd last ten minutes."

"Oh, I'd give myself at least twelve."

"Generous of you."

"I'm that sort of person, except I'm pretty certain that you're not the type to be, I don't know, nonjudgmental about secrets."

"You can't say that. I told you everything about that banker case that you were so interested in."

"No, you didn't! *Watson* did. Besides, that's not a secret. It's on the Internet."

"Regardless, you learned."

"You'd be bored immediately, if I told you."

"It would bore me to try and guess."

"So don't guess. Just leave it alone."

"Hmm."

You glanced at him with suspicion. Whenever he didn't have the last word like that, you knew that he was five seconds away from being methodical, because you lost whenever he did so.

"Do you not trust me?"

"Dammit, Sherlock. You don't need to try to appeal to my emotions or anything. I know how you think."

"They say trust is an important part of relationships…"

"You're still doing it! It won't work! And besides, for all I know, you read textbooks on how to be in a successful relationship."

"It's quite all right, I see," he remarked wistfully, with a well-tailored sigh and shrug of the shoulders. "You just don't like me well enough, then."

"What?" You blanched. "What do you mean by that?"

"If you liked me, you'd trust me. And you don't. It's not a big deal, my dear. I don't make it a habit of being liked."

You walked right into it. "No, don't say that! Wow--! You know I *do* like you."

"Yes, I know you *don't*, but you don't have to keep saying it."

"No, no! You're so awful!" You frantically pounded on his arm. "I *do* like you, Sherlock! I mean it, I care a lot about you! I do, I do, I *do*!"

He was smiling at you in that way that made you believe that you were part of a joke, a private little joke, and you just didn't know it yet. But you wondered if you would even like the punch line, if you knew it…

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## Chapter 16: Che gelida manina

**Author's Notes:** ~~this chapter JESUS CHRIST TOO FUCKING LONG~~ I'm going to have to raise the rating eventually, since, you know, sex. And it does happen because I'm looking at it, disgusted with myself, since my sex is too poetic and not enough dirty.

haha rea-tan you fool, i'd just straight up tell sherlock "you fucking peasant YOU DESERVE ME" but i guess you need a hug after this ~~FUCKING STANLEY FUCKING YOUR FEELINGS UP COME HERE BABY~~ but really i like making my rea-tans suffeR

also i always use "asshole" instead of "arsehole" because "arsehole" sounds too refined, as if you sort of have a begrudging appreciation, but "asshole" lays down the law

---

The days passed, and although nothing had happened in a while, you felt a storm cloud over your head–not just over your own person, but stretching across the whole sky. You woke up in the morning expecting rain, and were surprised to find that it was a bright, lovely day. And just what was wrong? If you were perfectly fine, then what was the matter with you?

The asshole from your file was on your mind again, partly accounting for the gray thoughts. You were now positive that you were not paranoid. You were definitely seeing him, now–you nearly bumped into him the other day. It's not like he'd have a reason to avoid you. It wasn't against the law for that free, innocent bastard to smile at you as you dropped your library book into the slot… You hated it. One of these days he might say "good morning!" to you, and since you had memorized his voice, you could imagine it perfectly. You had replayed the tape over and over again, the recording of his innocent cry of, "I would never kill my wife! I love her, I love her so dearly, I'm be*sotted* with her!" Oh, yes, the cry that softened the hearts of the investigators. Oh, fuck everyone. Just because he watched a couple of drama shows and knew to use present tense in talking about his wife–but on the other hand, he really might have loved his wife. But that didn't mean he was incapable of pushing her out of a window…

"Stan Stanley," you mumbled to your mirror, recalling your first meeting with him as if reciting a prayer to a devil. "And Esterhase said, 'Certainly not Stanley Stanley?' And you looked at me and said, 'Oh no, never, *always* Stanford Stanley, sometimes Stan Stanley, never *Stanley* Stanley.' And I said, 'What, no Humbert Humbert?' And of course I was joking and you looked ready to push me out the window, but, oh, it was just for a moment and nobody noticed. To your disappointment, there were no windows around anyway…"

Your cat stared at you, and you decided to just let the matter go. You weren't allowed to call the police just because you didn't like the way a man was looking at you. You'd gotten along by yourself for so many years, and you could manage now. What were you supposed to do? Run into Sherlock's arms and cry that you were scared? Oh, God! You would never live it down. No, no, you didn't want to ruin everything just because Stanford fucking Stanley showed up out of the blue uninvited. Everyone was mildly happy right now. Molly had gotten herself a kid from IT and you had glanced at him once or twice. He seemed harmless enough, if not a little metrosexual, and you were mostly just happy that Molly was happy. The poor girl had been distressed ever since you started dating Sherlock and you just wanted her to find someone who wasn't a total asshole. You could handle the assholes. She needed someone decidedly more dogged, and although you had the inclination to set her up with John Watson, you had never been a spectacular matchmaker and you figured you'd somehow get them both killed.

Stanford Stanley distracted you nevertheless, and it was beginning to affect your work. You were losing sleep and missing meals over this man, and that was completely unheard of for you. It was true that when Sherlock was on a case, you let yourself get lazy with it, but even when he was gone, now, you still got the job done but were unusually fidgety and sloppy. Your lack of sleep was making you irritable and hostile, and you found it hard to tolerate even your co-workers. But who could guess? You were internalizing this whole damn thing, so nobody noticed. Except one person, of course. One man who watched you so closely that no anxiety of yours could go unnoticed, even if he didn't know the specifics.

He was in the middle of a personal case, and the two of you were walking together as he spoke passingly of it. You were thinking about tugboats, of all things, and in retrospect it didn't take much deducing to figure out that your mind was in some faraway land.

And you came back to Earth when he asked you, "What do you think of it?"

"What, me?" You looked around in surprise.

"Yes, you. Who else is here?"

"Everyone." (You were approaching a crowd, after all) "But… That's not right. Wow! You don't care what I think."

It was not a hostile accusation, but a genuine exclamation of surprise. Sherlock never needed your help, never. You were well aware that you weren't half as clever as he was, and your input was about as useful as if he'd asked a gardener. Sherlock could read the minds and motivations of others so easily that you were incredibly envious. In fact, you actually preferred his input over yours. Your job wasn't about pride, it was about getting shit done, and your history had taught you that you wanted that shit *done*.

"What do I think, Sherlock…? Well, I tell you that I'm experienced in dealing with people, so I can't at all explain why a grown man in lingerie would be found slain and eaten by dogs. No killer yet, you see."

You had such an anxious look in your eyes, and he hated it. He hated it because he couldn't understand it and he had no fucking way of approaching it. It wasn't in his blood to be superlatively caring and conscientious. That was more in your area. So now what? He couldn't just ask you about it anymore, he couldn't get it out of you…

He noticed you continuously rubbing your hands together and asked, "Where are your gloves?"

"My gloves?" You looked down in surprise, as if you hadn't noticed. "Oh! It was my own fault. I hadn't coupled them and I was running late, so I just sort of left them… I didn't expect today to be quite so windy."

"Don't you ever take care of yourself? You haven't even eaten today."

"Not true, I ate breakfast," you lied, hitting your stomach to halt its dying walrus call.

"I swear… One day I'll have expectations for you and you'll fail to meet them," he rebuked, taking your hands and chafing them with his.

"Oh, don't be that way. I won't get pneumonia from cold hands," you snapped, although you didn't snatch them away. "I know, I know. You told me that I'd need a babysitter for a husband. I've yet to find him."

"No one will apply!"

"And I'm sure women are queued up to be resented by you."

He glared. "I don't… *resent* you."

"Aw, don't do that. That makes me feel worse," you replied as evenly as you could, but your fatigue and stress made your voice more strained than you would have liked. "You've told me a billion times, ex*cuse* the hyperbole, that you don't like people who aren't as clever as you, and I already know I'm not, okay? Once or twice I can be, but I won't ever be able to impress you."

By now you were feeling terrible and you wondered if you could just end your day now and crawl into bed before you said something else that you'd regret. But you were on somewhat of a roll now, so you continued on, taking his unusual silence as a bad sign.

"I mean, don't you realize how hard it is? Jesus, Sherlock. I can feel it sometimes. I am almost literally teetering on the edge of your opinion. You're so brilliant and astute and *good* at everything and I'm not, and I know that if you weren't dating me, you'd hate me as much as you hate everyone else who's beneath you… And I care about you so much that I go to bed every night kicking myself for something I'd said or done that I could have done better and that you must despise me for. Because I'm scared to death that one day you'll wake up and realize that I can't get anything right and–you'll realize that I don't deserve someone like you, because I *don't*, and I should be dating someone closer to my area. You know… someone with average intelligence who really has to ask me about my day because he can't read it on my clothes, someone who holds my hand even when nobody's around, someone who can't tie his own tie and who calls me up from the market to ask what kind of cat food we need… I mean, don't you *get* it?"

You ended the outburst feeling a little better with yourself at the same time you felt worse. You supposed that you'd need to get it off your chest somewhere down the line. But you almost didn't want him to answer. I mean, what the fuck was he going to say, anyway? He was probably disgusted, yes; he resented you even more… He hadn't expected you to get all emotional like some commoner. Jesus. Par for the course, you supposed.

Instead, he sighed and stared up at the sky. To your shock, you realized that you'd rendered Sherlock Holmes (momentarily) speechless. And for that moment, he was basically just like any other man who didn't understand his girlfriend's random, unexplained mood swings…

When he looked down at you again, he said, "You're going to cry."

"What?" You were momentarily disarmed. "N-No, I'm not!"

"It's fairly evident."

"I'm tired, is all… Fatigue makes me frustrated easier… Frustration makes me cry…" And although you technically hadn't shed a tear, his observation was making you stressed, and you ashamedly rubbed your sleeve against your face.

"Come on, now… Don't cry…" Although, this was Sherlock Holmes, and his attempts to comfort you sounded like an incompetent nursery school teacher who got caught in the headlights when a child fell down and scraped his knee.

"Why do I like you so much?" you accused, as if this whole thing was his fault. "It's not fair. It would be fairer if… we liked each other the same…"

Sherlock could have breathed a sigh of relief that you still hadn't figured it out. But he might as well give you a hint, so he exhaled sharply and bent down to brush a kiss against your cheek in order to relish in the perfume of your closeness, and when you turned your face so that your mouth met his, he humored you with reciprocation before releasing you.

"Why don't you think you're important?" he demanded close to your ear, his voice much quieter than you expected. "You're so important… If you left, I would track you down immediately, so don't think about it."

"Don't say that so loudly, now," you said, allowing a smile to tug at the corners of your mouth. "Someone might hear you."

"*Public displays of affection*," he spat, straightening slowly, "are incredibly bothersome. Why should anyone be forced to prove the depth of their feelings to strangers simply by getting physical in public?"

"Nobody's *proving* anything," you told him. "People usually do it because they, well, *like* each other. I know you're secretive and everything, but you didn't seem to mind when Adam Coveney was around…"

He ignored that. Of course he'd make out with you just because your ephemeral admirer had been walking down the hallway. That was a perfectly logical excuse, an excuse he'd never bothered explaining to you…

"Let's go," he commanded, taking your hand and practically dragging you along the path.

"Go?" you squawked. "Go *where*?"

"Baker Street."

"For what?"

"Your fatigue is causing you to break into hysterics. But since you seem incapable of taking care of yourself, I'm obligated to do that for you."

"I'm *fine*," you insisted, but you didn't resist, mostly because you had wanted to hold Sherlock's hand for such a long while, and you were accepting whatever circumstances it happened in. "What would you do, anyway?"

"I'm locking you in my room–"

"What, wow–"

"*Until* you get enough rest to not fall apart."

"I–" You were about to object, you really were, but you were cut off by the pain in your stomach that nearly made you double over.

"*And* you need something to eat. Honestly, how do you even manage by yourself?" He turned to you. "Moreover, I'd like a name to your plight."

You glared. "Fine. Stanley."

"First or last name?"

"You can figure that out."

True to his word, Sherlock took you back to his flat and practically stuffed food into you until even you refused to take anymore. All the while he was observing you carefully, prodding, inquiring, as if you were an experiment that desperately needed completing. You felt yourself drift into a food coma, and, sensing it, Sherlock dragged you off once more.

John Watson stared, all stammer and shock as Sherlock pulled you into his bedroom and slammed the door behind him. And he asked himself, "What? Did he really just--? Are they going to--?" But it wouldn't seem so. Thank God, he couldn't hear anything remotely suspicious coming from that room, although he did have the feeling that something extraordinary had happened, and as a meek human being, he had no right to have stumbled upon it.

Behind the door, Sherlock had bullied you onto the bed, although not really, since you noticed how soft it was and how *full* you were and you would have crawled onto it and kicked him off it anyway.

But for now you said, "Come here."

"*I* know how to take care of myself, and *I* feel perfectly fine."

"Don't pretend like your case is incredibly important," you replied with a pout. "I can tell you're already done with it. But if you leave then I'll leave five minutes after."

"Then I'll just tell John to put you back to bed."

"I'll bribe him with a date with my good friend Frances Harper."

"That might not even work."

"She has a massive rack."

"Damn."

And Sherlock had bullied you the whole way here, so now you bullied and coaxed him onto the bed with you, which, in retrospect, didn't take too much effort. You did drift into a comfortable sleep, but in revenge you tangled your limbs with his so nicely that he could not possibly remove himself without waking you or causing injury (and the latter would most certainly follow the former). And he supposed that he *was* just a bit tired, and a little rest never hurt anyone, and the way you shifted against him in your slumber was something he'd never really experienced before. This entire deal was new to him, really. There was a time when he never would have considered something like this to be worthwhile, and he couldn't help but wonder why it didn't bother him now. He knew the answer, of course. He considered pondering just how many of his own rules he could break before he went too far, but before he could, he too had drifted into the black.

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## Chapter 17: O dolci mani

**Author's Notes:** so it's Tumblrcanon that Michael Fassbender is Sebastian Moran, and since I love Fassy to the ends of the Earth I just feel the need for a headcanon where, before this story, Rea-tan meets him in a dentist's office and they date for a couple of months and have ludicrous sex before they break it off so he can go fight (or whatever the fuck Moran does in his spare time) i just have a lot of fassy feelings oKAY

SHERLOCK PUT YOUR HANDS AWAY ~~why must i write shit like this in public~~ the title to this chapter though

---

I tell you, Sherlock Holmes was rather clueless when it came to relationships, so it should seem obvious that he treated it like any other strange situation: he treated it like an experiment. You didn't know this, really. I must insist that you weren't used to "normal" relationships, so you couldn't tell the difference. Rather, you thought *this* was normal…

Sherlock was currently giving you presents, not for any real charitable reason, but so he could gauge your reaction to figure out just what you'd like. So far he only knew that you liked opera music and your SIG Sauer, neither of which made for good gift ideas. Rather, you seemed to have already have everything that you wanted… And he wouldn't feel bad at all for never giving you anything at all, but introspection as to why he felt the desire to make you happy all the time was another experiment entirely.

So he more or less tossed things at you and observed how you responded. You weren't very helpful, really… You loved free things, so you didn't turn down or even express disapproval with anything. You greedily accepted anything he gave you, with a pleasant smile. Boots ("How did you guess my size? Oh… That must be easy for you…"), hairpins ("A butterfly! Of course I'll take it, *Madame Butterfly* is my favorite… But I guess you were thinking to match my necklace."), and even weaponry ("What a lovely knife! Did you take this from a crime scene? It's so professional looking. But I think I'd like to remove this swastika.") all met with your approval.

And there was one day he was superlatively ashamed of giving you something: he had bought it on impulse and intended for it to be lost forever in the sea of 221B, but without you ~~keenly threatening a security guard~~ he would have had trouble with his last case, so he wanted to thank you properly. Sort of. He didn't really thank anyone, but now he had an excuse to continue his experiments on you. So as you sat balancing a plate of biscuits on your knees, he dropped something furry into your lap and you almost jumped.

"What's this?" You fumbled around and picked it up. "Oh, it's–it's…"

"You told me once that I looked like one," he remarked stiffly. "I thought you'd enjoy something silly like that."

At first he thought you must have hated it, for you were silent as the grave as you stared at it. Then he looked over at you and realized that an intense blush had spread over your frozen visage, and slowly you raised your hands to your cheeks, as if in shame and embarrassment. But, no! You were, you were… *Fawning!*

"It's so *cuuuute*!" you gushed, picking it up under its tiny arms and exalting it to the heavens. "Otters are so darling, yes, he's so *adorable*! I love it so much! How did you know…? Oh, I'll have to keep my cat from attacking him, but it's worth it! He's just so precious!"

And for that you practically pounced on him to kiss him, so he could reasonably assume that he had succeeded. He concluded that you'd accept anything short of a bomb, but a woman like you could probably find some use for that, too.

Now I must cheat you a bit and offer you a look at your engaged life, months later. It was the morning, and Sherlock woke to the feel of something light and soft treading on his back. At once he was bemused, since it was in your nature to sleep right on or near his back (a sensation he would actually *miss* in your times of separation), so what had taken your place…?

"Oh… Did I wake you up?" you asked from somewhere above him. He repositioned himself and looked up to find you smiling sheepishly down on him.

"What are you doing?" he mumbled.

"I'm taking Sherotter out for a walk… He's jealous of the attention I'm giving you."

"Sher–*what*?"

"Did I stutter?"

You withdrew your arm so that he could see what you were holding. Oh, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. It was that stuffed otter he'd given you when you were dating… Nestled between your breasts, giving him a look of smug satisfaction with its small, beaded eyes.

"…What's that around its neck?"

"A scarf! See, I knitted a little blue one, like the one you wear…"

"I can't believe you think that thing looks like me."

"I'm positive of it. I even got him a friend. Johnhog's over there…"

"You're kidding me." He lifted himself up a little to see a stuffed hedgehog idling on the nightstand, a knitted sweater covering its small form. "You're not kidding me."

"They're really cute together, I mean it… When you're not here I sleep with them so I don't get too lonely."

"So periodically, I'm losing to an inanimate object." He gave you a slow smile and stared at you unusually intently as he moved his hand to your leg. "I should feel insulted."

"Oh no, it's fine," you insisted. You walked the otter against his back once more, as Sherlock walked his fingers up and down the inside of your thigh. "Really, though, I think this is the best present you've ever given me… You're much better at gift-giving than you give yourself credit for. You must think it's silly of me to like it, but really, it's so adorable I can hardly stand it. He keeps me company when you're gone, and when he's with his Watson he looks a little happier, if you know what I m*eeee-an!*"

The last was a product of Sherlock slipping his fingers inside of you without warning. As he lazily moved across your folds, you dropped your stuffed boyfriend as if you'd been shocked, and he rolled easily into Sherlock's free hand. Your fiancé leaned over without releasing you and gently replaced your Sherotter next to his companion on the nightstand.

He withdrew and pulled you down for a sweeping kiss, not releasing you once as the two of you rolled back and forth across the bed. I suppose that the two of you were aiming for one of you to claim dominance, but since neither of you had any preference as to who was on top or bottom, it took some time. Eventually you landed on bottom, murmuring in satisfaction as he pressed his weight onto you and teasing his body so that he jerked and stammered.

You noticed something, and before he could continue, you suddenly prodded him and exclaimed, "Wait! Hold on!"

"What? What?"

You reached across him to your nightstand and carefully turned your two voyeuristic animals around so that they faced the other way.

"I don't want them to feel embarrassed or anything, or worse, turn them into perverts. That's goo*mmpht*!"

And back to the present, back to the end of March, back to pre-Moriarty and pre-Irene and everyone else who had gotten in your way by then. Sherlock was rather glad that you so easily accepted whatever he gave you. I'm rather glad, too. It's good that you were so compliant, especially since the next gift he'd give you would be a ring.

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## Chapter 18: Stridono lassu

**Author's Notes:** I guess this chapter is fine and everything but I like the next one a lot better

and the next one is even better than next but I think you'll like the ... fourth one after this one the best

or must i remind you all of the dates

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It had been a few days since that business with bombs strapped to people and corpses lying around. The whole affair saw you anything but utilized, since Sherlock seemed more than capable of figuring out exactly what motivated the killer, whoever he was.

And that killer was, apparently, a man named Jim Moriarty. (~~who turned out to be Molly's ephemeral boyfriend JESUS SHIT HOW COULD YOU LET HIM WALK AROUND LIKE THAT UNNOTICED~~) You didn't get anything out of Sherlock, which was strange, since usually he went to excruciating detail about everyone he bested. So did he lose? That must be it, since it was John Watson who told you about that mad, mad Moriarty. Apparently he had a sniper who could hold seven rifles at once, which actually interested you more than Moriarty himself. What dexterity that dragon must have! Oh, yes, that's right, more important things to worry over…

Sherlock was sitting in your office, and so were you, although that's generous of me to say. You were there, physically, rolling all around in your chair with your eyes on the ceiling. You hadn't said anything since he'd come in, and he knew exactly why: you were mulling over Moriarty in your mind.

*Apparently he did everything because he's bored*, you recalled, frowning deeply. *I think that's motivation enough. It's very new… very new for me. Actually quite interesting. In a morbid fashion. Sort of like how a dead body is fascinating but not at all pleasant. I think it would be quite lovely to talk to him. It will never happen, of course, and of course I would probably never want to be in a situation where I'm within a hundred feet of him. But I did fine with the woman from Liverpool who had the torture lab in her basement, and body count-wise I'd say that she's kill thrice as many people as Moriarty has… But then again, we bonded over Handel, so that's a completely different story. And besides, I wouldn't talk to Moriarty at all… he's thrown my boyfriend and the entire police force into such a dizzy that I might just shoot him in the head. I would shoot lots of people in the head, actually. I think that's a bad thing. Maybe I should talk to somebody about this. But who…?*

Sherlock wordlessly tucked his feet in when you rolled past, so that you did not run them over by accident. You seemed to have picked up your tempo, and your distress was beginning to become obvious.

And still, Sherlock was just as apprehensive, for he was recalling something that you did not know–something that Moriarty had told him, back at the pool. "*We both know that's not quite true.*" Of course it wasn't true. He had seen his heart twice today: once when leaving his flat, and now, here in your office as it rolled around in a reverie. He supposed that he was lucky. His heart, that disastrous human fallacy, at least existed outside of him. But it was his own fault for choosing to not be alone anymore. It would be easier if his most vulnerable spot was part of him, but it wasn't. It was a living, breathing specimen, one that happened to love opera.

Then what was he to do? At first he had thought himself lucky because his vulnerability existed outside of him, and therefore he could cut off his weakness at any opportunity. But he couldn't do that, no, not anymore…

You were about to roll past him once more when he abruptly reached out and stopped you dead in you tracks. You would have complained, but there was something inherently unpleasant in the way he said, "I need to ask you something."

"Well, then, ask it."

"If you were being attacked, just what would you do?"

"If I was being *attacked*?" You frowned. "That's sudden… Well… I would probably just shoot him."

"Hm."

"Oh, no, you can trust me," you continued on earnestly. "I have the quickest draw in New Scotland Yard–we got bored last November and tried it out. I say that meaning that I have the quickest draw next to Lestrade, and now I'm certain that the man is good at everything, but I did beat him once except I think he let me win… Oh, yes, but anyway, I'm unpleasant and trigger-happy. I'm sorry if my answer doesn't make you happy, but I'm not as clever as you and I'm certainly not as physically skilled as you…"

Sherlock still said nothing, so you frowned and looked him over. You couldn't tell if he was worried about anything–the man could be falling off a cliff, and anywhere between the top and the ground he would still be at least somewhat confident in his own abilities.

"What?" you demanded, growing unnerved by his silence. "What, do you think I can't handle myself? That's silly. I spend all day with the worst people in the world, and what? I should very well learn how to handle a gun. And–"

And, well, you had always trained yourself for the seemingly nonexistent day when you would confront Stanford Stanley. If he ever so much as bumped into you on the street, you were prepared to shoot him, to empty your magazine into the front of his face so that you'd never have to see it again. Stanford Stanley, the loving husband, the psychopath, your own little Moriarty… But now Sherlock was looking at you expectantly, and you clamped your mouth shut. Nobody had believed you when you told them that Stanley was a delusional wreck of a man, a man responsible not only for the death of his wife, but the deaths of those people you'd found in his basement… But they had disappeared as soon as you'd told Esterhase, wasn't that right? So who was the crazy man, between the two of you? In all probability, Stanley had never harmed a soul, and you had imagined the whole affair… That was what the investigative team had determined, and it would be quite likely that Sherlock would believe the same thing.

"And nothing," you finished. "But I know you don't worry about me, and I'm telling you that you needn't start now. So don't keep staring at me like you're deducing something about me, I mean, you could just *ask.*"

With that you pushed off and continued your rolling patrol around the room.

"Also," you added, "you can't get rid of me as easily as you'd like."

"I never said that."

"No, you implied it."

"I did nothing of the sort."

"Oh, come on, I'm not an idiot. I had a first relationship too, you know. You're so used to being alone that you want to stay alone–it's inertia. But you're not alone anymore, so you can't act like you used to, and you've got to understand that you're not the only person involved… so you should get used to it now, rather than later, that we're on the same side."

You were sure that the speech would have gone a lot more dramatically if you didn't start spinning in circles in your chair immediately after. I might add that you were guiltlessly smug about the fact that you'd gotten Sherlock annoyed to the point of him stewing in silence. Still, though, you wondered if there would ever be a day when Sherlock would actually want you around, *really* need you, or at least, you hoped for a day when he had to admit that he at least didn't want you dead…

*That sort of thing*, you mused, *might come years from now… with a man like Sherlock Holmes.*

You were a little off, I suppose. It would take only four days.

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## Chapter 19: Torna a Surriento

**Author's Notes:** ~~writing this made me happy for some reason~~ also ~~rea-tan that Headbutt of Love was a little too violent~~

also i was re-reading what i've written and
i think you all missed something
when sherlock said "you don't sleep with pants on" i was using the actual British term for pants
*guys he said that he knows that she sleeps naked* or at least very close to it

---

You were well aware of the fact that Sherlock Holmes needed a very wide and very private space for thinking. Although most women would be upset at being told to leave as soon as they entered their boyfriend's apartment, you just sort of accepted it as normal. And why shouldn't you? Stranger things have happened. Like the time John bribed you to help Sherlock load a pound of kidneys into the freezer so that *he* didn't have to…

Today, however, was just a regular day. You opened the door to 221B and came across Sherlock lying down in his, um, *thinking pose.*

"I'm busy," he told you immediately.

"I can see that. How long will it be?"

"I'm not sure."

You glanced at your watch. Ah, it was still pretty early. “That’s all right. Good luck with whatever’s bothering you… I’ll leave you alone. I’ll be back in ten minutes, okay?”

You said that just to be polite, really. You and John both knew from experience that Sherlock kept no record of when anyone left or return… in that way, he was sort of like a goldfish, you supposed. You weren’t even really offended when he didn’t notice you come or go… rather, you liked getting to walk out without any formalities, especially since you had a particularly unpleasant ex who had the habit of breaking out into tears if you so much as walked into the other room without a note.

It was a beautiful day, and you were more than happy to enjoy it while out for a walk. Sure, you loved the thunderstorms, but the last few days had been so depressing that you were glad that the sun had come out to say hello. You said ten minutes, right? Oh, he wouldn’t be able to tell the difference. Maybe you’d go looking around for some books, or maybe you’d go to the store and get the ingredients for tonight’s dinner before you returned… you were pretty sure that you’d left your phone at Sherlock’s place anyway. Ah, well, there was no one you needed to call. In fact, it was relaxing to not have any obligations… so you relaxed…

And, meanwhile, there was someone who was most definitely *not* relaxing.

When you had left Sherlock, he was busy mulling over a code that had come along with his most recent case. Ordinarily, he would have continued on as usual, seeing as how he had no distractions, no smoke filling his nostrils from an average person trying to think around him. Yes, yes, he was completely alone in his famed mind palace, and there was nothing to bother him, nothing at all…

And then: *Seven minutes, thirty-four seconds.*

He opened his eyes. Wait, what? No, no, and *no.* He would definitely *not* count down the minutes until you returned. That wasn’t his job. He wasn’t even supposed to *care.* He wasn’t supposed to notice, so why did he, all of a sudden? Of course, of course, it was merely because you’d given him an exact time, and he’d forget about it shortly, naturally… but, still, *seven minutes and fourteen seconds until she comes back.*

It was all your fault! You had left a timer going his mind… you were responsible for distracting him. He could hardly focus on numbers now, he was worried about *time!* The code was meaningless to him now, he could only think about *five minutes and twenty-eight seconds.* Ah, well. Five minutes wasn’t too bad, then he could continue on…

It became *three minutes and nineteen seconds* and you still had not reappeared. Obviously you weren’t turning in early. Sherlock briefly wondered where you’d gone, and mentally mapped out all the places in London where you could have gone off to. You liked scenery; you always accompanied him when he walked through the park… your arm looped around his, your free hand forever working to wrap your scarf a little more snugly around your neck. Maybe you were off buying something, oh, yes, he did remember you saying that you were nearly out of food… or was it that you needed some new music? Maybe your record player had broken… something like that, and *two minutes and fifty-eight seconds.*

When the clock hit zero, he looked expectantly at the door, as if you’d walk in at exactly the time you prescribed. Obviously not, obviously, right? You said that you were going to leave him alone. He grew oddly discontent at the way you’d phrased it. It really would have been fine if you’d stayed… your presence didn’t bother him at all… but there was nothing to be done. You’d be back soon. Soon.

Maybe not so soon. He was sitting up now, staring at the clock. You were three and a half minutes overdue. Well, that couldn’t be much of a problem. Maybe you’d walked for exactly ten minutes, and then turned around to come back to the flat… You’d be back any minute, any minute now, you’d return…

The door opened at five minutes and twenty-nine seconds overdue, but it was John Watson, who also seemed to be looking for you.

“No, she’s been out,” Sherlock replied stiffly.

“Huh, I’ll just have to catch her some other time… I have to thank her for the birthday present…”

“Birthday present?” he echoed, making a face.

John sighed. “Yes, Sherlock, *birthday.*”

“*Whose*?”

“*Mine!* And it was *days* ago–you mean you really didn’t notice?”

“It was your *birthday*?”

“If you cared to pay attention, everyone was in the kitchen… a cake? Singing? Blowing out candles, all of that? You were *right there.*”

“Oh, *that*?” Sherlock picked up his violin and plucked at it absentmindedly. “You people crowd around for all sorts of reasons.”

“You know what? I’m not even… I’m not even *surprised.* Never mind. So will she be back soon?”

“She was supposed to be back by now,” he replied, his face calm and his hands completely agitated.

“Did you try texting her?”

“She left her phone here.”

“Oh, so she’ll be back soon.” To Sherlock’s shock and disturbed fascination, John seemed completely unconcerned about the fact that you were a missing person. “When she does, tell her to call me.”

“*You’re* going out, too?”

“…*yes*, Sherlock, some people need, you know, fresh air.”

“Boring.”

“Have you gotten that code figured out yet?”

“There has been an attempt.”

“So you’ve still got work to do. I’ll be off, then.”

Once more, Sherlock Holmes was alone; except now you were eight minutes overdue and you still seemed no closer. Occasionally he went over to the window and stared out of it, but you never appeared… just where had you gone? Maybe you’d gotten lost… maybe you’d forgotten to return! No, wait, no, you would have needed your phone… no… so *where were you*?

Growing increasingly perturbed, he turned on the television and stared at it. If he didn’t fill his mind with some nonsense, he’d get ideas–ideas of you being stolen away, or having a spontaneous heart attack in your young age, or being confronted by that Stanley who he never bothered to research. (Christ! Why had he never bothered?)

News, yes, news was good… something mindless, something obvious, or–or, maybe, there was a report on a young woman killed as she crossed the street… hit by a cab, caught, smeared all over the streets. Nasty, by the looks of it, she was barely recognizable; she was dragged for a little while and her face had been run into the ground…

Immediately his pulse began to race, and he went to every length to calm it down. The accident happened far from any route you ever took, yes, you’d have no reason to be anywhere around that street… right? But maybe you took a different route! You’ve been gone so long! Yes, you’d have plenty of time to make it there! He could think of every street in London, and he could easily imagine you crossing any one of them, meeting your end in the middle. You could have crossed the street without looking; you could have been that woman!

You were now eleven minutes and thirty-five minutes overdue. That was it: you were dead. Gone! What had he done? He had made you leave; he had forced you to leave! It was his doing! His fault! You were dead because of him! And what was the last thing he’d said to you? Telling you that he was busy, telling you that he needed time to himself… this was another one of your “anti-acceptable” moments. Did this happen to all mourners? Regretting the last words they’d said to their beloveds? Wait, wait, I mean, not that you were his beloved, of course, what a sentimental term. He meant, you were, um, *important*, more or less.

A knock at the door, and his heart was in his throat. There they were–the police telling him that you’d died, that they’d identified your body. Or maybe it was John, maybe he’d seen your body for himself, and had come to inform him of the news. He would have to act unsurprised, yes, he couldn’t let any panic show…

“Sherlock! I’m back. Sorry for leaving my phone around… did anyone call?”

He was up off the chair immediately. You, you, it was *you*! Alive, smiling, your cheeks reddened from the chilly spring day.

“Where have you been?” he asked, meaning to sound nonchalant, but it came off as a demand nonetheless.

“Oh, me?” You were surprised that he’d even noticed. “It was such a nice day. I walked all around and then got some groceries… but what’s the matter? You look pale! What’s happened?”

You were not involved in the accident. You hadn’t even heard of it. (“That’s awful! That poor woman, but you know how cabbies drive…”) At first, you thought that some part of the death was bothering him, until you realized that he was fussing over *you.*

“You’re all right?” he probed, inspecting every inch of you for any sort of damage.

“Of course I’m all right… what did you expect? I stubbed my toe getting up the steps; I think that was the worst of it…”

“You’re *sure* you’re all right?”

His voice was so strained that you looked up in concern, but he didn’t stop his busy examination of you. Knowing that he wouldn’t stop unless you did something, you sighed and grabbed the front of his shirt and, pulling him down, slammed his forehead against yours so that he was forced to look you in the eyes.

“I’m *fine,*” you reiterated in a low tone. “Are *you* all right? I don’t see what the problem is… you knew I was leaving. You don’t ever notice any other time… what’s gotten you so worried?”

“I’m…” A long, long pause.

“*Yes*?”

“I’m ssssssss…”

“Wow! Are you… *sick*?”

“I’m sssss…” It wasn’t a word he used frequently–he was a little rusty.

“I think you’re turning into a snake,” you teased, although you didn’t let him go from the headbutt just yet.

Oh, well, he couldn’t do it. “I didn’t mean that you had to leave.”

“You don’t have to say that,” you insisted. “I’m fine with letting you do your thinking. Your cases–that’s your own world. Don’t let me get in the way of it.”

“You’re *not.*”

“All right, then, for next time, I’ll know… or I’ll at least come back on time–were you really *worried*?”

A long while before he admitted, “Yes.”

“…oh…” Sheepishly, you smiled, leaning back. “I’m a little flattered.”

For good measure, Sherlock looked over his shoulder and all around, but sure enough, there was no one in the flat but you and him. So he leaned down and began kissing your face, wherever he could reach, never twice in the same place, while saying: “Stay here… at least… for now… this code… it’s irritating… next time… don’t forget your phone… John needed something… forgot when he left…”

“Oh, John! I hope he liked his present…”

“Hm… was it really his birthday?”

You laughed. “I’d told you about it for a week.”

“Lost it.”

“Much like the heliocentric theory. Oh, no, no–don’t stop–I just read it on the blog–“

When John returned, he found the atmosphere much calmer than when he’d left. Perhaps more surprisingly, he found you on the couch with Sherlock, you sitting between his feet opposite from where he was lying, with your bare feet absentmindedly sliding over his stomach.

“You’ve come back,” John greeted. “Good–I needed to tell you, thanks for the gift you’d gotten me. Very thoughtful.”

You smiled. “I’m glad you liked it.”

“Sherlock, how’s the code going…?”

Your feet had slid much lower than you’d intended, and now they rested in a dangerous area between his hips and thighs. And he started and said, “I’ve got it–”

And then Sherlock got up, sent John on a snipe hunt into the other room so that he could guiltlessly kiss you good-bye, and then left without a word. When John returned, saying, “did you say the pen was in the *left* drawer or *right*?” he found you confused on the couch.

“Where’s Sherlock gone?”

“This is new,” you remarked. “Wow! He’s left without a word… I have no idea where he’s at…”

You and John were stumped. I don’t blame either of you–you didn’t have all of the pieces yet. Neither did your friend Frances Harper, who stepped out of a cab to see Sherlock Holmes standing on the pavement, staring up at some sign for a store, and the look on his face suggested that he was about to go into battle alone. Which he was, really. So she had another piece to the puzzle. The third and last piece belonged to the jeweler at the store, whose newest customer arrived after staring for a while and then mumbled that he would very much like to browse.

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## Chapter 20: Iera son salita tutta sola

**Author's Notes:** guys i was going to up to links to pictures of rings and everything since i was researching for way too long
but i couldn't decide if a solitaire set or if a pave set looked better, they were both gorgeous and i realized i have terrible taste
so
*whatever*
*it's not even may yet*

---

The life of Sherlock Holmes had been one challenge after another. He had made his way through all of them with relative ease, but now he was faced with an impossible task. Nothing, nothing had prepared him for this! Nothing! Nothing in his life had equipped him with the experience or competency to stand in the battlefield, as he was standing now…

And that metrosexual bastard behind the desk asked, “Can I help you with anything, sir?”

“*No*.”

“I’ll be here if you need me, sir, just ask.”

Sherlock slunk behind the glass displays, prowling around in silence for the most important gift he’d ever give you. None of this business made any sense to him. With a single glance he could make out the quality, the style, every fact about the diamond–clarity, carat, cut, color–but what did it mean? What did it matter? Was it supposed to be significant, or something? He’d found women to be obnoxiously particular about their preferences about matters like this…

“Looking at engagement rings, eh?” The jeweler propped his elbows up on the counter and smiled to the point of unsettling his customer.

“Yes,” was the reply.

“Your girlfriend?”

“No.”

“She’s your lady, then. Your missus.”

“Yes.”

“I see she’s not here right now,” he went on, not exactly endearing himself to his customer. “This is a surprise, then?”

“Yes.”

“So what if she doesn’t say yes?”

He was clearly teasing, but an unfounded train of panic roared through Sherlock’s head. What *if* you said no? What would he do about it, then? There were too many variables surrounding it. Not a high probability, to be sure, but he wasn’t completely convinced that he would get an absolute *yes*. He would have to plan it very carefully… no, he had to make sure to *not piss you off* right before he intended to ask. But what if he would have nothing to do with it? It depended on the day, maybe, he’d have to be careful, lest–

“Not that she *won’t* say yes, to be sure,” the jeweler added hastily, seeing as how his customer went totally silent rather than laconic. “I’m sure she loves you very much.”

Ah, yes–he saw you clearly… you, at a crime scene, leaning over some ravaged corpse, moving hair out of your face and pulling off your gloves, then, upon looking up and seeing him, you would be smiling a little, hopping over the body to come see him, taking both of his hands in your own, smiling wider, saying “Oh, *Sherlock*– “

“I say, sir, are you all right?”

“Nothing,” Sherlock remarked stiffly, and without lying, explained: “Chest pains.”

“Do you know her ring size, sir?” Of course he did. “Oh, perfect. We have a wide selection of that size. Over here, over here. It’s a diamond you want? Or would the good missus want a birthstone? What might hers be? We have a large variety of cuts you can choose from…”

“Diamonds are fine.”

“Those will be more expensive, of course.”

“It doesn’t matter to me.”

“Then I take it this will be your first fiancée.”

“Then I can assume by your own ring that you’re on your third or fourth marriage?”

“W-What? How could you possibly know–“

“Oh, no, I’m not making an accusation. Cubic zirconia, though. Very economical of you.”

“Very sharp, sir… but I assure you that, um, we have real diamonds on display here…”

“I should hope so.”

It was stupid how much effort he was putting into this. At least, *he* thought so–he wasn’t freaking out over every detail, as some proposers did, but he was aware of how much care and caution he was putting into this selection. At first, he merely thought that nothing was good enough, until he realized that nothing was good enough *for you*. And it downright startled him that, for once, he was being completely selfless: he wanted to give you something that you deserved, something that you would think was important and beautiful, something that you would cherish. He wondered if this was what *sentiment* felt like. Sort of like indigestion.

Finally, Sherlock settled on a ring he thought was the most aesthetically appealing. There was no question about it–he tapped on the glass, almost irritated, and said, “That one.”

The jeweler sidled over, relieved that his job would be over soon. “Are you sure, sir? That one’s fairly expensive–“

“I don’t care about how expensive you think it is. I’d like it.”

Now the jeweler was sweating. Was his patron really loaded, and he hadn’t noticed? Oh, God! He’d just accidentally insulted a rich customer! “Oh, absolutely, I’m not discouraging you or anything. Right away, sir. Here, let me work it out for you–“

So in the end, Sherlock Holmes could chalk up another personal victory–he’d gotten an engagement ring. It was a rather private victory, though… he’d told absolutely no one about it, and since he was being a little too shifty about it, it confused the hell out of you.

“What’s the matter?” you asked, genuinely concerned, as you sat on the arm of the chair that you occupied. Your feet rested on the opposite arm, forming a bridge over his body, and you hoped he wasn’t staring at them because you’d neglected your exercise over the past couple of weeks. But he wasn’t looking at you–in fact, he hadn’t looked at you since you’d arrived at his flat, and he was currently staring at the same point in the wall as when you’d first walked in. That was why you’d asked.

“Nothing’s the matter. Why would anything be the matter? You always assume something’s the matter. Nothing is.”

“Uh… okay.” You absentmindedly fluffed your hair. “Are you sure? You’ve been acting strange ever since you left, that one day…”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I didn’t do anything, did I?”

“Why would you think that?”

“Because you still aren’t looking at me.”

Pensive, you bridged your fingers (as he was already doing) and attempted to draw your own conclusions.

“Ah, that’s it! I know exactly what the matter is.”

From beside you (beneath you?), Sherlock froze, although you didn’t notice.

“I’m in your thinking space again!” you determined resolutely, with a sharp nod. “I get it. I’m too close in proximity–I should leave.”

And when you got up to leave, you really only meant that you were going to go into the kitchen to get something to eat, so it downright surprised you when Sherlock snapped “*No*” and caught you by the skirt.

“Oh, be careful with that, sweetheart, I’m about ready to fall off–“

For just a moment, for just that moment, he was ready. He would ask you, he was going to ask you, he was going to get it off his chest and he would *finally* ask you and you *would* say yes–

Unless, of course, John Watson picked that fucking moment to return to the flat. I mean, naturally. That was life.

“Evening, Sherlock. Oh, *you’re* here–I hoped so. I got this and I realized that there’s no way I’m eating it…”

You practically backflipped off the chair’s arm. “You bought me a muffin? God bless you, John Watson…”

And John couldn’t fathom why Sherlock spent all night glaring wordlessly at him from across the room.

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## Chapter 21: C’e. Entrate

**Author's Notes:** it's molly (the hbic) v. a man with the emotional IQ of a twelve-year-old (still though i love how rea-tan is being all introspective and mature and we have sherlock to juxtapose her with)

also i love molly so muuuuuuch
i pair her up with everybody because i want her to be happy
also i just watched the ending for parade's end I CAN'T SEE THROUGH MY TEARS I'M SO HAPPY

Admittedly, it wasn’t easy for Sherlock Holmes to lose his nerve. You had never been able to stop him from running straight into dangerous situations for the sake of his case (although you had never really tried). So why, then? Why was he avoiding the inevitable? As in, why was he taking so goddamn long to propose to you?

I agree that plotting marriage is a little difficult, and I might thank God that I’m a woman and I’m not the one who’s supposed to be worried about all that proposal nonsense. But this seemed too much for even Sherlock Holmes to handle, seeing as how he had placed the ring intended for you somewhere in 221B. And for a while, he was determined to leave it there, forever lost in the rubbish of the flat. I admit that it’s a fairly expensive paperweight, but what was he supposed to do? He’d had it for almost a month now… this was inertia at work. You were none the wiser, so it’s not like you were anticipating anything…

In all probability, you would have never seen that ring had it not been for one woman, one woman whom you already loved but whom you now owed your engagement to. Oh, yes: the unflappable Molly Hooper. For once, she had to come to the rescue of everyone, and although you played the role of lionheart with more style, she did it with more finesse. Mostly. I mean, this was still Molly Hooper.

Poor Molly Hooper was at an impasse. The poor darling had been having a rough time, you must understand. Her last boyfriend was allegedly gay, and then disappeared without a trace. And of course, you were dating Sherlock! The two of you were pretty close (since you could talk about your careers without fear of strange glances or stares), but she’d never told you about her feelings towards Sherlock, so when you started dating him, she could only stare on with a helpless smile and support you. She didn’t want to say anything to you, for fear of upsetting you, and the last thing she wanted was for you to think that she was some backstabber who was out to steal him away from you, although you would have never assumed anything like that.

Oh, but how she loved you! She didn’t care that you were dating Sherlock, she just wanted you to be happy, much like how you just wanted her to be happy (which was why you kept trying to set her up with some of your exes, although they always came off to her as “vaguely criminal”). Had you been anyone else, Molly probably would have quietly resented you until the end of the world, but you were *you*, and despite her personal feelings, you were the closes thing she had to a best friend and she wanted to cherish that.

Had you known that she liked Sherlock, you would have probably made noise akin to the sound of a dying whale while flying into the sun. Hurting Molly Hooper in any way was like stepping on a fluffy kitten, and you know what that felt like–but please don’t tell her that you accidentally stepped on poor Toby’s tail that one time. You wouldn’t have blamed her if she had been bitter, or jealous, or willing to say every bad thing about you. But she didn’t and you really do owe her for that.

The occurrence happened at St. Bart’s, in the lab that Sherlock so often frequented. Molly and he were on one side, with you and John on the other. As usual, you were doting on John, who had no idea what the fuck he had done to earn your adulation. (Spoiler alert: you thought he was adorable) Sherlock was staring at a sample underneath his microscope, its importance the reason why you and John were waiting for him. He was focusing, yes, but not all of his attention was on it. How… *annoying*. So I guess you really should leave the room and give him his thinking space, or else he’ll be too distracted by you… but then, as soon as you leave, he will think about you again, so there’s no point in going anywhere at all.

Molly would look at him, then at you, and after the fifth repetition of this she realized that Sherlock Holmes wasn’t paying attention because you were right there. And something had to be on his mind, right? He’d never let a woman get to him, no, never, even if it was his missus. She looked down and mulled over what the matter could be. Had there been a row? Oh! Maybe some normal girl would feel victorious, *yes, maybe they’ll break up and I can have him!* But this was Molly Hooper and she thought, *Oh, God! I hope they’re all right!*

In her opinion, you and John had at least a somewhat positive effect on him. He was somewhat nicer, sort of, a little bit, in his own little way. Okay, he was *comparatively less awful*. I think that’s a fair assessment. It was probably because you were unruffled by anything he said, and John just wouldn’t put up with it. And Molly had thought that you all had been quite happy together, since you couldn’t help but pay close attention to John Watson, and as a result, Sherlock was determined to make a competition out of it and pay even more attention to *you*… so what was wrong now?

A flash of insight ripped through Molly’s head, and it took all of her effort to not have her jaw drop open in surprise. *Oh, that’s right!* She remembered, that’s right. She knew what was going on between the two of you. You had been talking about it, a couple of days ago, when you went out to lunch with her…

“What’s the matter?” she’d asked you, looking distressed despite the fact that you weren’t very perturbed yourself. “You look like you haven’t been getting enough sleep!”

“It’s fine, it’s just…” You sighed heavily. “I just feel a little terrible.”

“That’s not fine at all. What’s happened?”

“Nothing’s happened. Here, I’ll buy lunch for you today–you deserve it. What do you want?”

“Um, I don’t know. I think I should go on a diet…”

“Life’s too short for diets, darling. I’ll get you whatever you want.”

It took her a minute to realize you were spoiling her to cover up the fact that you were tired and lethargic. You were picking at a food, which was incredibly out of character for you, and every now and again you stared out the window, distracted, even though she was telling you about a recent torture victim, and that was a subject that always got your attention.

“I’m sorry,” you apologized, even though she hadn’t even said anything–she was just giving you that look of wide-eyed concern and you couldn’t take it. “I’m just kind of frustrated. Not at you, I mean. At myself.”

“B-But…” She laughed nervously. “You haven’t done anything.”

“I know, I’m sorry…

“Oh, please! Please don’t keep apologizing; I don’t know what to do.”

“I’m ssss–um, all right.” You squirmed in your seat.

Molly wasn’t a professional at advice–she can’t be blamed, either, since her whole career is working with corpses–but she felt even worse just sitting there and watching you frown. So she tried her hand at “normal” girl relationships and said, “If there’s anything wrong, you can tell me…”

You looked up at her and smiled a little. Something about Molly Hooper brought out the younger girl in you, and although you usually weren’t big on overloading your problems on other people, Molly looked so innocent and open that you couldn’t help but confide in someone like her.

“It’s just silly,” you replied, fidgeting some more. “Just some relationship issues. Really girly stuff, you know? Nothing you’d be interested in.”

“No, tell me! I’ll listen, um… Even if I don’t know what to tell you.”

“God bless you, Molly Hooper.” You smiled a little crookedly at her. “I tell you, I’m just being silly and stupid. Sherlock and I, well… we’ve been dating for a little while. He’s not sentimental or affectionate or anything like that, I get it. I’m not going to cry and stamp my feet about the fact that he’s going to avoid the words ‘I love you’ for his natural life. But… I need *something*, you know? Just a soft word or *something*, something that could tell me that he’s at least a little fond… oh, now I’m being all goopy.”

You covered your face in your hands. “Now just listen to me… I’m being so selfish. He’s not that kind of man at all, is he…? I’m asking too much. It’s a wonder why he hasn’t dropped me flat on my rump yet. He can probably smell it on me… the need for *sentiment.* I don’t want to bother him, he’s done a lot for me already… oh, I’m just getting upset because my stomach’s empty. Molly, why have you let this food sit on my plate for so long?”

You said nothing more on the subject, hoping that Molly would just forget about it, but she didn’t. She wouldn’t. And she knew firsthand that Sherlock was, erm, not exactly emotionally conscious… but she could try, couldn’t she? Yes, she could try for you, and if it didn’t work then you wouldn’t know one way or the other…

“Sherlock?” she asked, a little timorously, her voice a little sparrow-call of a whisper. She didn’t want you to hear her conversation with him, but to her satisfaction you seemed distracted.

Sherlock did not look up–he didn’t even give recognition that he was listening, which didn’t really bother Molly, since such a thing was par for the course. So she continued.

“Um, I know it’s not my business, but… I just thought you ought to know… you should tell her how you feel. Isn’t that right?”

Again he gave no notice that he was listening, and now and again he adjusted the microscope, although Molly couldn’t discern what for, since it was surely out of focus by now.

“I know it can be scary, to tell someone how you feel about them, but…” She faltered for a moment and looked down, but pressed on, bless her heart. “She’s not going to push you away. She probably, um, feels the same way. Not that it’s my business. But if you don’t tell someone how you feel about them as soon as possible, then…”

She didn’t finish–she already felt that she had said too much. But she was satisfied nonetheless, in some small and insignificant way. Still, she hoped that she didn’t ruin everything between you and Sherlock… at best, she hoped that Sherlock really hadn’t been paying attention. But he was completely still in his seat, and despite the fact that he had nothing to stare at but what was under the microscope, it was apparent that he wasn’t even looking at it.

Molly, now growing less and less certain of her success, excused herself to anywhere else. And as soon as she’d departed, Sherlock stood up and left without a word, and you and John went chasing after him. At the moment, your dear Molly Hooper was not aware of how her words had affected Sherlock, but you would learn, later, in the most permanent of ways.

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## Chapter 22: Vogliatemi bene

**Author's Notes:** so when i first started writing this (on sunday[!]) i was reading the horoscopes because they're usually harmless, light, good moral advice, things like that. So since I like Capricorns I read Sherlock's and it said something along the lines of "be careful in your offers for today" and then Pisces (Rea-tan's semi-canon sign) said "take caution in accepting favors/offers today." HOROSCOPES WHAT THE FUCK. also i'm a taurus because I WAS BORN ON MAY 18TH WHY THE FUCK ELSE WOULD I CHOOSE SUCH AN INSIGNIFICANT DATE and since you all have been wonderful in reading this so far and getting to the actual engagement ~~AND FINISHING THIS CHAPTER JESUS SHIT REMEMBER WHEN I SAID I WAS GOING TO WRITE DRABBLES~~ I made this saccharine, diabetes-inducing mixtape. it's too nice I CAN'T EVEN

---

To say that he baited you to 221B that May evening is a horrific lie. Sherlock Holmes did ask you to come over, at least, he thought so–and he promptly forgot as soon as he did. It was a rare, spectacular moment, like a meteor shower or finding a four-leaf clover–Sherlock realized that he was about to do something important and it would be for the best that he didn't cock it up. So I guess that was why he took up his violin and began to clear his thoughts.

At first he wasn't quite away of what he was playing, but after a moment or two he was cognizant of the fact that he was playing something for *you*, you, who wasn't here at the moment. You did have a habit of throwing music down in front of him and excitedly entreating that he play it for you.

"I don't do requests. I play to clear my head."

"Please?"

"I'm not saying it again."

"*Please*?"

"I'm not going to–"

"*Pleeeeease?*" You scooted closer, gazing up at him with puppy-dog eyes. Oh, of course that didn't work on him, *that* only worked on softhearted idiots…

"If it will get you to stop, then yes, just this once," he said for the seventh time.

And now he was playing to no one but himself, which was good for a change. He needed to get his thoughts in order, yes… he had already decided what to do with you. Now, things would be much easier if he stopped viewing the event as daunting a task as dismantling a bomb in a pitch-blank room using nothing but three paper clips... (Although in retrospect, a feat like that would be much easier for him) And as he finished the song, he was contented by the knowledge that he still had lots of time before he would have to confront you about his intentions… Maybe he could just throw the ring at your face and you'd take it without saying anything, yes, that'd be easiest…

"Wow," you remarked, "that was gorgeous."

He put down the bow very, very slowly and looked at you. You were staring up at him from across the room, your hands clasped together in your lap, your eyes all aglow with awe. How the fuck long had you been sitting there?

"I didn't hear you come in."

"You sounded busy, so I didn't say anything," you explained hastily. "It happens a lot though, doesn't it? But I wouldn't want to interrupt *Madame Butterfly.*"

"I don't even know what I was playing."

"It was 'Vogliatemi Bene.' The end of the first act–wow, oh, yes. I gave the music to you a few weeks ago." You stared up at the ceiling and recited it from memory. "*Love me a little, just a very little, as you would love a baby. 'Tis all I ask for. Ah, love me a little… I come of a people accustomed to little… grateful for love that's silent, light as blossom, and yet everlasting as the sky, as the fathomless ocean…*"

Sherlock was staring at you and you didn't notice, since you were still watching the ceiling, fondly recalling when you went to see the opera in the States. It was a good thing you weren't looking at him, though–he was watching you so intently that you might have had a heart attack. I mean, he would almost give you one *later,* but for now you had no idea of what was to come.

"What day is it?" he asked you.

"The eighteenth."

"Already? Hmm."

He disappeared into another room, and before you could ask him why he'd called you over, you began to get drowsy. You'd spent all last night working and didn't get to bed until very late, or rather, until very early… you were sure that he'd forget that you were here in a moment, or maybe he'd go out… you yawned and curled up into the armchair you occupied, wondering if you could get a catnap in before John arrived.

You weren't sure if you ever fell asleep–you remained in the ambiguous limbo of pre-nap haze–but when you came to, you felt a little more refreshed. You looked around the room and listened closely through the flat, but you couldn't hear Sherlock anywhere. Had he left? Maybe you could steal some of his food without his knowing–

"You're awake," he remarked from somewhere above you. With a half-shriek, half-curse, you flopped around in the chair and looked up to find him standing directly behind it. He stared down at you as if you were part of an experiment (which you really were, forever and always) and you had just done something according to plan.

"S-Sorry," you apologized, although you weren't sure what for.

"No reason to be," he replied with an indifferent shrug.

"Uh, well… What is it?"

Sherlock seemed to be contemplating something, and you wished you had enough pennies to ask him for his thoughts. But before you could even open your mouth, he dropped something onto you which nearly cracked you on the head before tumbling into your lap.

"Take it," he told you.

"Might I ask what it *is*?"

He moved to go sit in the chair across from you, so you assumed that you were just supposed to look at it yourself. Squirming a bit, you examined it. It looked like a jewelry box of some sort, and you nodded slowly, wondering if it was a pair of earrings or a brooch (did people wear brooches anymore?) or something like that. So when you opened it up and realized that you were staring at an expensive, elaborate engagement ring you, you–

You didn't say anything.

The tension in the room was palpable, if you cared to pay attention. Sherlock was staring at you with the same unreadable expression as before, but he was beginning to get concerned. More than concerned. The favorable outcome would have been for you to simply say "yes" and that would be the end of it. He would even have accepted if you would have thrown it down in disgust and screamed "*no*" so loudly that Mrs. Hudson would have run up to wonder what the matter was. But, no! You were staring at it, wordless, unblinking, not looking up at him or even around the room. You didn't look ecstatic and you didn't look upset–you didn't look *anything*, and he realized that he didn't foresee anything like this.

It was a minute and twenty-two seconds of silence before you finally said, "This is…"

"Yes."

"And it…"

"I assume that you can deduce what it means."

"Oh, God." You covered your face. "Oh, God. Oh, God."

"Not an unreasonable response, I'll concede, but not very helpful for me."

You opened your mouth and closed it: he could practically look behind your eyes to see you working out various appropriate responses. You shifted once, twice, three times… you took the ring out and turned it round and around in your fingers.

And you said: "Oh, God, how could you do this?"

Sherlock stood, and stood in front of you. You are not a weepy woman by any means, but that was all it took to get you to burst into tears.

"You can't ask this of me," you cried, your voice an interesting arpeggio. "Why would you ask me? I'm going to… I'm going to ask too much of you. I can't get you to love me."

"That's unnecessary for you to believe. You've been doing enough already."

"No, I mean…" You could feel the wetness in your eyes, but you were determined to not let any of it slide down your cheeks. "All I want is for you to be happy. But how could you be happy like this? You don't need anyone to love you. But I need someone to love me, don't you understand? I'm going to ask too much of you. And I'm telling you, I can't make you happy, I'm going to want all this love and respect and patience and understanding and I'm going to tire you out."

"You're not asking for anything I don't give you already," he replied, helpless once more as soon as he saw that you were a second away from crying. "You're not asking for anything that I wouldn't be willing to give more of."

Sherlock was aware that plenty of women cried during proposals. He wasn't sure that this was the context he desired. Well–you weren't *crying* yet, except now you wouldn't look at him and you were looking for subtle ways to pass your sleeve over your eyes.

"I don't even know your family, you don't even know mine," you realized, growing panicky. "You've never met my siblings… I've never met your parents… and you have a brother, don't you?"

"I'd rather you make an effort to avoid Mycroft entirely."

"We haven't even been dating for very long, have we? Not compared to other people..."

"I don't care what other people do. Unless you think we're ordinary."

"And then there's values and children and everything, wow... oh, God, why haven't I thought about any of it before? I can't drag you into anything, Sherlock, I don't want to make you upset… you know I'm so, so… *stupid* and ordinary and boring, I'll just get boring on you someday, no, I can't do that to you. Of course I want to marry you but I *can't.*"

So he took several deep breaths and said: "You're awfully wrong. Look at me."

"W-What?" You looked up hesitantly.

He leaned down, not too close but a little closer, and looked you over. "I told you already, you're important. Incredibly important. I've never thought you were stupid, never… never dull, never boring. You can't ask too much of me because I will already do whatever you ask… you see? You've made an idiot out of me. Talking about my feelings, *sentiment.* I can't do it and that's why you think I don't... *care* about you, but I do."

He took another deep breath with the uncomfortable realization that he needed it to stop his voice from shaking. He was speak softly, much softer than he'd intended, and it surprised you.

"You need to learn how to be more selfish," he advised in that pompous way of his. "It will only work that way. When you're so altruistic and sentimental, I'll only disappoint you. And I will most likely disappoint you, multiple times. Because I know I can't give you everything you want, everything you deserve, in the way that you're an emotionally needy human being, like the rest of them. I know nothing of that. I can only give you what I have, but I assure you that I will properly give you all of it. I suppose I can't blame you if you wake up one morning and run in the opposite direction. You should be patient..."

You were still a little teary, but now, he expected it was because of different reasons. You still weren't saying anything, so he sighed and continued.

"You have to understand that I can't be like regular people. It would kill me. So when you told me that you wondered what it would be like to see someone else, someone *ordinary*, you did not realize that I think about it just as often. Perhaps you deserve someone who could love you in such a simple fashion. But I do need you–not in that awfully dependent and maudlin way that people usually claim to *need* each other, but yes. I need you to put up with me when I don't do what you want. Yell at me, if you'd like, if you think that would help. I need you to accept what I can give you. But I just need you to love me because you have utterly ruined me, and now I refuse to think about meandering through this ordinary world without you."

There–he had done all he could. He could do nothing more. He was in that frightful position where everything was completely out of his hands and he had no choice in any of it. You could walk out of here and he would not be able to stop you. “In God’s hands,” you’d say, to which he would reply, “and what makes you think there’s a god?” “Oh, it might be lovely. You never know.” And so forth…

But, perhaps, for just the briefest moment, there was some higher power in the universe–he could think of nothing else that could make you smile at him and say, “All right.”

“…’all right’?” he repeated, exhausted by his monologue and not sure what anything meant anymore.

“Yes, yes, Sherlock… of course, yes… I just want to make you happy, that’s all… and if I want to go through trials and tribulations and all of that, I would much rather it be with you, because you’re very eloquent and much easier to deal with than other people.”

He stooped lower, almost in disbelief. “Say it.”

“Say what?”

He was almost stern. “Tell me that you’ll be my wife.”

“What! Of course I’ll be your wife. Why, what am I supposed to say?" You were a little cross when you looked up at him, the expression you always had when he didn't quite get something that seemed obvious to you. "You should know by now that, and if you don't, then..."

He leaned forward. "Then?"

"Then, well..." You squirmed, losing your fight a bit as you stared meekly at your hands. "Wow! I mean, yes. Um. Well, I don't say this very often, but... y-yes... yes, I love you. I love you a lot..."

You glanced up at him, anticipating some sort of jab at sentimentality, but instead you found him smiling at you, actually smiling, although before he got just too close, he had to remind you that he was still Sherlock Holmes...

“Good,” he replied, “because that ring was ridiculously expensive and I’m not returning it.”

“You’re such a romantic.”

“I mean it. I might have had to give it to someone else.”

“Sherlock!” you cried, weakly pounding at his stomach. “You know, I’ve been your fiancée for thirty seconds, you might as well not cock it up so quickly–“

And then you heard the rumble in his chest, and although he was trying to fight it, you nevertheless heard the deep, rather delightful sound of Sherlock Holmes chuckling at your misery. In a moment of shocked revelation, you realized: *Sherlock Holmes is… teasing me!*

“You’re such a monster,” you laughed, standing up and sliding the ring onto your finger. “Tell me, Sherlock, aren’t you happy?”

“What do *you* think?”

“I want to hear you say it or else I’ll throw the ring right out the window.”

“It’s inconsequential.”

“How much did this cost you, anyway?”

He sighed. “For this brief span of time, then I suppose I can say, yes, I am… *happy.*”

You looked back up at him and realized he did sort of look happy in the way that he wasn’t giving you some smug look–he looked sort of like how he did when he was proving himself right–and then insight struck you: *Sherlock fucking Holmes just proposed!* He had actually gone into a situation here he was completely out of his element, in the wilderness, so to speak. He might actually be–*happy*! You couldn’t let this go to waste!

“You man!” you exclaimed. You embraced him so excitedly that you nearly broke his back–you lifted yourself up and pressed your lips to his which wanted your kiss. Oh, yes, there would be matters to deal with, there would be things to talk over and problems to work over, but for now you accepted the fact that you were happy, and you really deserved to feel this way, so you were going to enjoy it…

“Wait, wait,” you interjected, before he could make you dizzy and lose your better judgment, as he so often did. “If John comes–“

“I’ve already locked the door.”

“Good planning…”

And when John Watson finally *did* arrive around midnight, you were gone, with no trace of you left behind. And Sherlock was smug, almost downright pleased with himself, but was oddly charitable and even affable.

“Are you all right?” John asked, immediately suspicious and unable to fathom what could have put his flatmate in such a mood.

“Absolutely.”

“Are you *ill*?”

“I’m always *someone’s* definition of ill.”

John thought nothing more of it until he saw you the next day–you were also pleasant, although that was nothing new for you. He wondered if you would know anything about it.

“I’m sure you could use your deductive reasoning,” you advised. “Maybe a good case turned up while you were out.”

And you patted him on the arm, and that’s when he noticed the ring on your finger–

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## Chapter 23: Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja

**Author's Notes:** ~~JESUS LADY CALM DOWN~~ oh and to the person who e-mailed me and asked who Jones was, it's nbd. Since I base all my Rea-tans off of characters I have, I based this one off of one called Ingrid Jones. She, um... she was pretty close to this Rea-tan, except Ingrid played the piano and she wore browline glasses and skirts... and she had bangs... I called her Inge... because of Brandon Inge... and I just realized Brandon Inge's birthday is the day after mine... wow why do any of you pay attention to this THIS WAS SO POINTLESS

so i'm listening to the sherlock soundtrack and irene has her own theme and i'm wondering what this rea-tan's theme is
i'm torn between a calm, thoughtful piano/violin track, and something involving cannons and electric guitars

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A phone call would have sufficed. A letter, even. Anything! Anything as a *warning*! But, no... I suppose that was too much to ask for.

It was a couple of weeks after Sherlock had proposed to you, and you were strolling down the pavement of London in an effort to lighten your mood. Somehow, you'd been dragged into the whole business with Sherlock stealing a bus, and were named "an accomplice" despite the fact that you had been in Norway at the time. So you'd taken some time out of your day to take a relaxing walk... no distractions, no worries, no purse. ~~oh God dammit you'd left it at his flat *must you forget everything* well you have your gun and your phone so what else in the world would you need?~~

You were not aware that you were being followed, nor should you have been. The streets were crowded as usual, and since you weren't plagued by that charming visage of Stanford Stanley, you weren't paranoid and you didn't intend to be. But you were being followed and it would have pissed you off if you'd known.

And you didn't even realize that you were being watched until you passed a girl who was squatting down on the corner. She was petting her tiny teacup dog, who sat patiently and seemed to stare at you when you glanced at it. Reasonably, you passed her not expecting much, until she said your name.

"Excuse me?" You turned on your heel.

"That's your name, isn't it?" The girl scooped the little dog up and stood, fixing an incredibly eerie smile on her face.

"Uh," you said, "yeah."

"Of course you are. Get into the car."

On cue, a completely unremarkable black car pulled up beside the two of you. You stared at it with mild disgust and simply said, "No."

"I'm afraid I must insist."

"Um, no."

"I advise you not to resist," the girl advised, her smile staying but her voice growing sharper. "It'll be easier on you."

"I don't get what you're playing at, but I'm not in the mood for it. If you're here about that business with the bus, I repeat, I didn't even know it happened, and I'm *not* signing any forms."

"I'm not here for the bus theft. My employer wants to see you."

"And does your employer have a name?"

"He says that you'll know who he is."

You twitched. Did this bitch honestly think that you were going to stroll right into some unmarked car just because she sounded fancy? No, no, fuck no. You weren't going to play along. What the hell was her play, anyway? It was in the middle of the day, with people all around, and she hadn't even tried to attack you yet. Didn't she realize that you'd prepared for this?

"I think your co-worker will get in trouble if he lets his car sit there for much longer."

"Then you should get in." And after a pause, she realized that you really weren't going to move, so she said, "Do it for your fiancé."

She immediately realized her miscalculation. Your eyes were colder than the fucking state of Alaska and you were now reaching for your sidearm.

"You tell *him* that he can threaten me all he likes, but he if he ever tries to fuck with *my* fiancé, I'll kill him and it won't be pretty. Do you understand me? Because as far as I'm considered, you're disposable."

It was against her job to get pale, but she did, and she held her dog in front of her like a shield. "I think you're misunderstanding this. He–"

The driver of the car, noticing that the whole affair was taking too long, stepped out and gave you an up-and-down glance.

"What's the hold-up?" he snapped. "Just get her into the car."

"*He's* going to get shot, too."

"For God's sakes, woman, just get in. It'll take ten minutes of your time."

"Are you going to blindfold me?"

"I was *going* to, but damn it, I don't want you getting any ideas with that gun of yours and you end up *shooting me in the cock*!"

Well, fine! They weren't drugging you and they weren't cracking you on the back of the head, so with a huff and another glare at the woman with the dog, you got into the car. Oh, but you didn't get into the backseat, like they wanted–you went right to the passenger's side and got in, slamming the door as you did so, to let them know who exactly they were fucking with.

The man looked at you and sighed as he started up the car. "You're going to play it this way?"

You narrowed your eyes. "I work for Scotland Yard, you know that? I'm not going to sit in the back like some twit. If I need to shoot you, I want a good angle to splatter your brains out against the window."

"Oh, really? And why would you want to shoot me?"

"Well..." You were stumped. Wasn't he aware of his own intent? "You kidnapped me. You're taking me to see Stanley, right?"

"Who's Stanley?"

"*What*?"

"For the record, this is hardly a kidnapping. You threatened me and my associate, and then remained unharmed as you got into the passenger's side of the vehicle on your own accord."

"Whatever."

You stared out the window, trying to remember the twists and turns he was taking, but after a moment you recalled that you were terrible with directions, and you resigned yourself to accepting whatever was going to come. You weren't going to meet Stanford Stanley. At once you were both relieved and disappointed–under no fucking circumstances did you want to meet your archenemy any sooner than necessary, but you also wanted to get it over with. So who were you going to meet today?

The driver eventually stopped in front of an old warehouse and told you to go inside. With a grumble you complied, and went inside to meet the person who so wholeheartedly wanted a meeting with you.

I can tell you that, today, you can't really remember your first impression of him. You were too annoyed to stow it away in your memory. You were just aware of the fact that you found yourself glaring at an unknown man. By your guess he was in his late thirties or early forties, but the fact that he looked just as irritated as you felt probably aged him up a little. He held an umbrella despite the fact that it hadn't rained all day.

You greeted him with: "My kidnapper, I presume."

"I hear that you weren't exactly easy to coerce."

"I don't go into the cars of strange men unless I'm bribed with candy, I'll have you know," you replied dryly, folding your arms. "Who are *you*, and what do you want?"

"You don't know who I am?"

"No!"

He seemed legitimately surprised, if only a little. "So you've never heard of me?"

"That doesn't make any sense. If I don't know who you are, how can I have heard of you?"

"Very well, then. I can tell you that I know everything about you–where you were born, who your parents are, where you went to school... even where you ate lunch yesterday afternoon."

Genuinely confused, you replied, "You read my receipts?"

"You're the one who dealt with that Stanford Stanley case, aren't you? What a messy piece of business... how clumsy of you all."

"I'm still not against shooting you, you know. For the record *I* did *my* job and it's not my fault."

"I also know that you happen to be engaged."

"Wow, that's pretty amazing." You lifted up your left hand, on which your engagement ring was shamelessly displayed. "I wonder how long it took you to figure that out?"

"Engaged to Sherlock Holmes."

"What, did John blog about it? After the whole bus business I haven't been keeping up with it..."

"You're as insufferable as your fiancé," the stranger observed, his mouth twitching up in an annoyed smile. "I, however, am willing to remedy that."

"Pray tell."

He held out a piece of paper, and with a suspicious glance you took it. Reading it, you lost your voice for a minute or two before saying, "Wow. I... I think I could buy an aeroplane with this."

"Perhaps."

"Um, what's it for?"

"The sum will be yours," he said, "if you break off your engagement with Sherlock Holmes."

"*What*?"

"Please don't make me repeat myself. It's tiring."

You wondered if you were going to go through this day without shooting someone. You wondered if you could get Lestrade to mark this down as a crime of passion if you killed someone because you overreacted about your fiancé...

"The driver outside told me this would take ten minutes," you remarked, teeth gritted. "But it would take us at least two hours to go through all the reasons why I won't break up with my fiancé."

"Oh, how *noble* of you," he replied, teetering on that obnoxious border between bored and completely irritated. "How much more money would you want?"

"Why do you think throwing money at it will change anything? This isn't a marriage of convenience or anything."

"You think that he's marrying you out of *love*? How sentimental. Surely you're aware by now that he's not that kind of man."

"Wow, I'm glad you're a certified relationship counselor," you snapped. "I'll take your opinion into consideration and promptly disregard it."

He really did seem to want to play on womanly insecurities, so he pulled out the big guns. "So you're engaged, and he hasn't even told you that he loves you?"

"Do you even know the man? I'm just hoping that he'll say it by our fiftieth anniversary. What, am I disappointing you? Sorry, I don't grade my fiancé on the standards of sappy, clichéd romances. Since I respect him I can at least be patient until he motivates himself to say something like that."

"You do realize he's a virgin."

"I can change that."

"What was that?"

"I said, um, it doesn't matter to me."

"That's not what it sounded like."

"Then pay better attention!"

"You do seem pigheaded on the subject," he decided with a little pitying shake of his head. "It looks as if I can't persuade you. A pity. I was merely trying to save you."

"*Save* me? Ha... Don't get me wrong, I don't like those dependent girls. But Sherlock Holmes need only say the word and I'd forever stumble around in the darkness to follow him."

You checked your watch. "That's about ten minutes. I think that's fine. I have to get going now, though. It was nice meeting you."

You both surveyed each other with something akin to contempt, yet there was some reluctant mutual respect in there, too. Come to think of it, he sort of reminded you of Sherlock. He couldn't be persuaded, he was kind of an asshole, yet he had a way of speaking that made you want to laugh at someone else's expense.

Awkwardly, you looked back at the paper with the large sum written on it and said, "Uh, do you want this back? I'm not going to dramatically throw it at the wall, or anything. It wouldn't even be dramatic... it's paper."

"Oh, you can keep it as a reminder."

"A reminder? What? That I lost a lot of theoretical money because I want to marry the man I love?"

He smile was mocking, but he said, "No. Consider it a sort of wedding gift."

"*Wedding gift*?"

"Will you repeat everything I say? You'll get the money. Eventually. In small sums."

"For *what*?"

The driver had reappeared and was working on dragging you back out the door, although you resisted and considered elbowing him in the face.

"You're quite a charming girl, despite my preconceptions about you," the stranger decided. "You're quite right in that you're not in the ranks of mewling women with soggy romance on their minds. Even if you are incredibly annoying, I think you'll make a tolerable sister-in-law."

"What the *fuck*?"

"You should work on your language. It's unbecoming."

"You–!"

But you were tossed into the back of the car ~~"I thought we were friends!"~~ and the driver returned you quickly in order to get rid of you as soon as possible. You were unceremoniously dumped within a block of 221B, and you made your way over to it with a permanently offended expression.

Sherlock and John were both in the flat, with Sherlock going through your purse while John looked on disapprovingly.

"Oh, there you are. Look, I *told* him not to, but he *insisted*."

You flapped a hand. "Ah, it's fine. It was a matter of time. Find anything interesting, there?"

"You have a mold of teeth that aren't yours."

"Oh, that's, um, I was going to throw that out."

"I'll keep it. A dual window-breaking hammer/seatbelt cutter."

"I saw American programming that said you should keep that in your car if you ever go off a bridge and have to rescue yourself from a car getting filled with water... what? I think that's a good reason. You should never be unprepared."

"A twenty-sided die?"

"I was going through a phase!"

"You look fatigued," he noted suddenly, staring at you intently. "You haven't been around the park at all. Where have you been, darling?"

"Whenever you call me that I feel like I've wandered into an alternate universe where you take care of injured animals and John blows things up and then walks away all slowly."

(And John: "You know, that's oddly specific.")

"But anyway, yeah, I just saw your brother. I'm not sure we had a great first meeting but I like to think it went over well. I threatened to kill everybody and then he offered me a lot of money for me to break up with you, but hey, I think we had a connection. What's his name, you said? Mycroft?"

Cue Sherlock and John staring at you like you'd just announced that you assassinated the Queen.

"Can I have my purse back now, though?"

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### Chapter 24: Addio dolce svegliare alla mattina!

**Author's Notes:** yep
next time

When Sherlock awoke, you were already there at 221B. As he pulled himself out of the fog of the catnap, he could hear your soft footsteps as you moved through the kitchen… you were humming something from *Carmen* as you worked. He attempted to exercise his brain: when did you arrive? He would swear that you just teleported into the flat on a whim.

There was something oddly pleasant about you being nearby–not just when you were sitting across from him or even when he could see you… just the knowledge that you were somewhere close, doing something unspecific, maybe not even thinking about him but thinking about *something*, made him insignificantly more pleased. It was incredibly strange to realize that you could do absolutely nothing and he'd still like you for it…

Someone had called you, and from your half of the conversation he could reasonably guess that you were talking to Frances, that friend of yours with the generous bosom.

“Yes, Fran. No. Yes, I’m at his flat. Wow! *No.* Well, yes. You don’t know? Of course you have to stir it. It’s going to burn otherwise…”

He fell asleep again sometime after that, and when he awoke it was dark outside. He woke slowly then, as his body became increasingly sensitive to touch. Yes, touch–there was light pressure on his forehead, then through his hair as you briefly ran your fingers through it… the feeling of your breath on his cheek, and then sudden loss of heat as you moved away.

He reached out to grab you and got a hold of something soft. From above him he heard you laugh and say, “You always grab me by the skirt. One of these days you’re going to tear it off by accident.”

When he opened his eyes and looked at you, you were smiling. He wasn’t exactly sure how late it was, but you’d gotten your coat on and looked ready to leave.

“You’re going?” Sherlock mumbled, trying and failing to fight himself out of sleep.

“You shouldn’t stay up so late, you know… it just kills you the next day. But yes, I’m just about to leave.”

“You just got here.”

“I’ve been here two hours.” You were amused. “John even came in.”

“He did?”

“And then left… you didn’t notice him do either. The usual.”

His brain finally splashed cold water on its face and he took a deep breath. “You’re wearing a new perfume.”

“Correction, I’m *wearing perfume*. I’m sort of glad you never noticed that I’m not a big fan of it.”

Now he was sitting up, gradually working his way to a standing position. “You’re wearing something new, yes, something you haven’t worn before… you were saving it for a special occasion. Manicured nails, for once… and you showered before you arrived here. You’ve gone to great lengths to achieve an alluring appearance. What for?”

“You’re still half-asleep. You’re not deducing fast enough.”

“Then I must be missing something.”

“Something I assume wouldn’t happen if you were in the right frame of mind.”

“So enlighten me.”

“I…”

You were leaning forward, very forward, close and very close and you were almost murmuring in his ear. It was telling, yes, even he could figure it out, but even he couldn’t believe what it was all adding up to. He was upset by the distance between the two of you and you compromised by wrapping your arms around his neck and kissing him, and that was good, yes, that was favorable, although there was something different in this… not unpleasant, *no*, by no means, but you had never before been so, so *intimate* and he was now beginning to get an idea of what you were trying to say. Were you really, though? Were you really intending to–

Someone else had arrived in the flat, and as usual the two of you pulled away and attempted to maintain a casual air. Judging by your pleased expression alone and not even bothering to see who it was, he knew it was John. You darted off to some other room, greeting him with your usual “*John* it’s great to *see you* did you pick up the bread *ugh you’re fantastic* oh here I *just remembered* I brought this with me to give to you so take it!”

“A jumper! For me?”

“I remember you said that one of your old ones got ruined and oh, I don’t know, I saw it and I thought it’d look perfect on you…”

“It’s lovely. Thank you!”

Sherlock stared at the ceiling as if intending to bore holes in it with his gaze. *You’re not serious.* You had dressed up to give John Watson a present? How many goddamn gifts could you give that man, anyway? You spoiled him, surely…

You returned to him after a moment, looking all happy with that warm glow of generosity and thoughtfulness that Sherlock himself would never be able to replicate, for obvious reasons. He was able to stand to see you off, now, which you would use to your advantage.

“I’ll be off,” you said with a smile, pressing his hand. “I’ll see you soon, all right?”

“Well, all right.”

“*Very* soon.”

“What does it matter–“

You leaned as if to give him a good-bye kiss, but then changed your mind and gave him a long-lasting kiss on the neck. It was warm in the flat, but he nevertheless got a shiver that ran up and down his entire body.

“Good-bye,” you said without pulling away, your words reverberating through him. “See you.”

He watched you leave, and stared at where you’d been a long while after you’d gone. Surely I can’t fault Sherlock Holmes for not being entirely aware that you were trying to seduce him, but it’s all right. These things take time. You’d succeed the next time.

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### Chapter 25: Osculetur me

**Author's Notes:** this is long and it's nearly 3:30
barely edited
if any mistakes then please go away

~~I could see her as a birth control girl~~
~~we're horny people~~

Sherlock had been inside your flat only once, and that was only for a minute or two. You were incredibly reluctant to let him observe where you lived for fear of him nitpicking you on every last deduction he picked up. But at the moment you were engaged to him, and you supposed that you could just hold that against him if he tried to criticize you.

But now, oh, no–now you had a motive. You'd kept it so subtle that even he hadn't picked up on it, but that might just be because he was sexually inept. So he was a little confused as to why you would ever want him over.

"Just come over," you repeated.

"Why?"

"Because I want to see you."

"We saw each other yesterday."

"Yesterday was a long time ago."

"What do you want to see me for?"

"I just *want* you to come over."

"Do you have a reason?"

"Yes."

"Is it important?"

"Very."

"So you can tell me."

"I'm sure you'll be able to figure it out. So come over quickly."

And you deserve some sort of medal or award, because you did manage to get him to come over… in fact, he arrived mere minutes after you rang off, despite the rather generous distance between the two of you–and the fact that it was pouring rain outside. You were actually *surprised* when you opened the door.

"Sherlock!" you exclaimed.

"You sound surprised. Did you forget already?"

"Oh, no, but…" It was raining right on him, so you pulled him inside. "I didn't expect you so soon."

"You told me to come over *quickly.* I assumed that the matter was pressing."

"Um… go sit down. Do you want a towel?"

"Yes, please."

You went off to go fetch it and ended up staring at the wall. You'd told yourself that you were going to go through with this, and now you were convincing yourself that it was a completely bad idea. Sherlock Holmes was not going to sleep with you. He was *Sherlock Holmes*, celibate hero, asexual, completely uninterested in the more elegant parts of women. You entertained yourself with imaginings of going in to kiss him and him artfully dodging, leaving you to smack your face into the wall… or trying to take his trousers off and getting told, "*Noooot* interested."

"I've been rejected before," you told yourself. "And it didn't bother me before, right…? Yep, I can get through this. If he's here already then there's no point in turning him back. He's probably down there, yes, observing your SNAFU of a flat and deducing the best way to tell me that I'm terrible… yes… to get rejected by your own fiancé… brilliant."

Sherlock *was* looking around your flat (what else was there to do?), but in truth he couldn't find anything unsatisfactory in it. You did leave some things here and there (probably in your usual rush to get out the door), but overall he found it pleasant mostly because everything here was evidence of *you*: you getting ready for the day, you relaxing in the evening, you cooking dinner, you making a call or reading a book. Everything was *you*, except, of course, for the grumpy cat that sat across from him and stared at him judgmentally.

"Go away," he told it.

It moved a little closer.

"Go. I don't have time for you."

A little closer.

"Go find your mother."

And by now it was right next to him, and it told him "*Maaahn*," as if giving him a mocking challenge, and he sighed.

When you returned, you found your cat on his lap, looking smug as Sherlock idly scratched its neck. You smiled as you toweled his hair off yourself.

"Your cat is irritating," he told you, without pausing.

"He probably thinks you're a peasant. Come on, now…" You scooped your cat up and carried him off to another room. "Now, go sleep or something like that. Leave us alone…"

You anticipated Sherlock's first question, so when you got back, you prepared for his "What did you want me over for?"

"I told you that you need to figure it out."

"You've given me nothing to go on."

"I thought you like a challenge."

"I don't think I understand you."

You nodded slowly. Being a reasonable woman, you didn't expect him to figure it out without any hints, so you humored him. As in, you were indelicate enough to straddle his lap and kiss him so fiercely that you left him too breathless to ask another question.

"Is that indicative enough?" you inquired.

"Um," he said, "I'm c-cold."

"I can fix that."

This time, your kiss left him so dizzied that by the time he came to, he found himself flat on his back on the ground, with you sitting on his chest, staring down at him. And you asked, "Warmer yet?"

Ah, yes, Conroy: "*She made my bloodstream feel like the place that the gods had to find before they could discover fire.*" "Yes."

"Good. I enjoy being hospitable."

You smiled and kneaded on his chest, allowing him to regain full control of his senses. By the looks of it, that would take a little more time than it would normally would… he looked utterly disoriented. So you were ridiculously proud of yourself.

"What is it?" he asked you, reasonably trying to determine why you were so, um, *close.*

"Sherlock, I want you to come to my bedroom."

"What's in the bedroom?"

"A bed."

"I'm not tired."

"That's lovely."

Now Sherlock was staring at you, because, holy *Christ,* he *just* realized what you were hinting at. Your pupils were dilated, your pulse was elevated, your–

"Sherlock," you said, "I want to have sex with you."

Oh. I mean, *that* clarified it very neatly…

"I think that's indelicate to say," you reasoned, looking up at the ceiling. "Then let's be poetic about it. Sherlock, 'come, let's go to bed… let's lose ourselves in love!'"

"You want me to–"

"You honestly didn't need that last word."

"You do realize that I'm–"

"Don't care."

"I…" He was taking deep breaths now–you could feel yourself rise up and down with his effort. "I don't think so."

"Do I repulse you?"

"What? No."

You eased yourself off of him and gave him what might have been a sincere smile, in another universe. Instead you looked like you'd just been stepped on, which was sort of accurate. Ah, well… damn. Rejected by your own fiancé. Granted, you should have seen this coming since he was practically asexual, but it *still* hurt. He was supposed to be able to divorce himself from feelings, right? It would be nice to be able to do the same.

"Do you want your coat? I'll go get it for you.'

"And now you want me to go?"

“Jesus, Sherlock. Pity a girl, she can only be rejected a certain number of times in one night. Or would you like to outline why, for me?”

“You know very well why I *can't*.”

“You’ve got me there, darling. I actually have no *fucking* clue why.”

“I… You have to understand me. It’s not because of *you*, except it *is*. My mind must be superior to my heart. It’s how I survive. Nothing can change.”

“Then you need to brush up on your psychology, because last time I checked, people fall in love with their minds and *not* their hearts. So just relax, all right? Where did I put your coat? I’ll go get it…”

It was in a stupor of humility and humiliation that you realized that you’d left his coat in your bedroom, since it had the only coat closet in the flat. You took your time, not exactly in the mood to run right back to him and face another reminder that you were undesirable. But, you just didn’t get it! Your ex from the army practically blew your brains out in the bedroom, so you had to be attractive to *someone*. Well, you guessed that your first problem was fooling yourself into believing that *Sherlock Holmes* could be attracted to you…

You heard something at the doorway, and, thinking that your cat had come to investigate, you turned a little and were surprised to find Sherlock standing in your doorway. It shouldn’t have been a surprise that he was at least *present* in the flat, but you nevertheless jumped and accused, “You scared me.”

“Listen to me.”

“Can’t we just drop it?”

He approached you as one approaches a wild tiger, which was for the best in this situation. “I don’t think you understand. If you’re willing to be *reasonable* for a moment, I’m *quite* willing to–”

“For Christ’s sake!”

Using the minimum of your training, you flipped the approaching Sherlock right over and shoved him onto the bed before mounting him. Although this sort of position would have been ideal some time ago, right now it was somewhat less than intimate, mostly since you had gripped the front of his shirt in your fists and the force of your shaking repeatedly crashed his head against the bed.

“Don’t you get it, Sherlock? I don’t want you to tell me why you don’t want me. Protect yourself with a wall of celibacy, never let your hands grace my arse, whatever. I’ll accept it. But just don’t go around *telling* me, because I’ll just give myself crazy ideas like what I’ve had tonight. It won’t happen again, I promise, but please, don’t be a bastard about it. I love you and everything, but that can only go so far when you practically tell me that you’re put-off by the very idea of being in bed with me.”

He took a long a sigh, and you narrowed your eyes in complete suspicion.

“What’s that for?”

“You know,” he said, slowly, “I don’t want you to get the wrong idea. I don’t think you’re an idiot. Far from it. But you’ve given me plenty of evidence to suggest that you and I are on very different levels of deductive reasoning.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“What did you tell me when I first came in? Oh, *that’s* right–‘*You need to figure that out.*’”

“Look, I don’t…” A flash of insight slapped you in the face like a wet fish, and you looked down–and by down I mean *down*, and only then did you have full evidence of what you’d done to Sherlock.

“Oh…” Pause. “*Oh*. I’m… I’m so sorry…”

“No reason to be, I suppose.” He closed his eyes and sighed. “So you’re wrong in that I don’t… *want* you. But in order to work I need to rely on reason and logic. Succumbing to carnality would be counterproductive.”

“Hm… Not unreasonable, I’ll concede.” You let your hands slide up and down his chest, figuring out just where to touch to make him squirm. “But, Sherlock, tell me… haven’t geniuses been procreating for centuries?”

“Yes…”

“Of course. Or else the brilliant would have died out by now. So why must you ostracize yourself?”

“I’m sure you would vastly prefer some alpha male well-versed in physicality.”

*Jesus, can he still smell my ex on the bed?* “Honestly, I would much rather someone that I actually enjoy being with. And it’s really not impossible. Just tell me what you like…”

“I... All right...”

“And I’m very sorry for tackling you like that.”

You leaned forward and gave him a kiss as an apology, right before deciding use this new development for your own gains. You sat back, allowing yourself to press just a bit of your weight onto where he was getting hard. Sherlock did his absolute best in resisting movement, but you were playing hardball, so to speak…

“Well?” you went on. “Do you forgive me?”

You idly shifted your hips back and forth, and he replied, “Aqwiouernlkm.”

“What was that?”

“Could you repeat the question?”

“I want to see you naked,” you decided, and you were very quick about doing just that. I don’t think even Sherlock could have guessed how quickly you would be able to undress him, and honestly, it was just because you had been mentally practicing for that very moment.

And when you looked over your finished work, you were so pleased that you could only murmur “lovely, lovely” as you just barely resisted kissing every single part of it. God damn, he was a *consulting detective*! Where did he get so fit? It’s not like he was built like a weightlifter, but you realized that you were getting far too antsy at the sight of his body.

“I’m going to feel like shit in comparison,” you muttered as you got up. “I don’t even know how to striptease, mind you. And you don’t have to act like I’m some professional. I just prayed that I didn’t trip out of my panties trying to get out of them.”

You wanted to shut as many lights off as possible, only because you now began to doubt the attractiveness of your body. You had neglected to find any attractive undergarments to wear, and even if you did, you were upset at how your body had decided to betray you at this crucial moment. Stretch marks had seemingly appeared overnight… oh, God! Those weren’t the legs of any model, and why did you look somewhat pregnant whenever you looked at yourself from the side? Not a body for seduction, nope…

Just as you were about to suggest playing the lottery and turning all the lights off, you heard Sherlock call your name, and you were struck with the note of near-desperation in it. But that could hardly prepare you for turning around and looking at him–but, God, his expression nearly blew you off your feet. His eyes were almost black for want of you, and he was watching you with a mixture of poorly concealed awe and heady lust. No one had ever stared at you–you’d only slept with one of your exes, and as ferocious as he was wont to be, he had never looked at you like that. Like you were desired. You, some insignificant human being, a blip in the course of history and probably a mistake on the part of a divine being, but for right now someone wanted *you* and someone was worshipping *you.*

“You’re so far away,” he gasped. “Please, come here.”

He could have asked you to crawl over and you would have done it. He sat against the headboard, watching every movement of yours as you kicked off your pants.

“You should know,” you said with a smile. “What was that you said to me, right after we first met? ‘*You prefer to sleep with no pants on.*’”

“I find that I’m spot-on, as usual.”

You had never mastered any seductive bed-crawl, but you supposed that you really didn’t need to. Sherlock Holmes had no women to use as a precedent against you, and honestly, he was already staring at you like you were the most fucking desirable woman in the world. And why hadn’t you done this earlier, again?

“You’re pretty well-endowed, for a consulting detective,” you noted, sliding your finger over his manhood with some curiosity and smiling at the way you made him hiss through gritted teeth. It wasn't wrong of you to try to be at least somewhat alluring in this position, so you attempted it. “But you’re so wet already, Sherlock. I haven’t even done anything to you yet…”

His body strained at every word you said, eager for movement that he didn't know how to complete. But you really did like the position he was in, so you decided to utilize it. With a growl you moved so close that you were sitting on his lap, legs kneeling on either side of him. He lifted you up, just slightly, with you becoming more and more acutely aware of his hips and cock rubbing against you, and oh *damn*, you were going to have sex with Sherlock fucking Holmes. You didn’t deserve a medal, you deserved a parade in your honor.

You make some noise akin to *Sheeee-suhs* as he slid into you, filling you up all the way until your hips met. God, when was the last time you’d been laid? You weren’t a woman of casual lovers, that was for sure–you had been mad enough at yourself that you’d only had one man in your life, before your fiancé. It had been so, so long since you’d felt this dizzy, with ephemeral pain clouding your mind.

You didn’t realize that you’d been breathing heavily, and when you came to, you felt Sherlock almost trembling under you–needing to move but not wanting to on account of your sudden stress. So you turned your eyes to him, and then he realized that your eyes were as dark as his were, and, oh, *yes*, you didn’t even need to say anything.

With a groan he accepted and thrust into you, and with another *Jay-sus* your toes curled immediately. He was holding you so close that your bodies moved with every thrust, and the friction on your body and his just felt fucking fantastic. Your main thought, setting aside the near mind-numbing pleasure and animalistic carnality, was that *There’s no fucking way that he’s a virgin*. Nope. Virgins were supposed to be taught, right? The whole point was that they were inexperienced, always taunted. But then, how? He was bringing you dangerously close to screaming, and *you* were the one who had been trying to seduce *him*. Every thrust was accompanied by you being reduced to little but a whimpering and moaning mess into his neck as you tangled your fingers into his hair, which in turn led him to gasp and kick his hips a little faster at the sensation.

He tugged a little at your hair and you lifted your head only to assault him with a kiss that would have been fairly inappropriate at any other time, but now it was simply unbearable. He was getting close to the edge, but no, not yet–he enjoyed you moaning his name far, far too much, and he refused to finish without making you just that much more inhibited. A woman’s body was no mystery to him–it was all anatomy. So when Sherlock slipped his hand down and ventured between your legs, you were quite indicative about where you wanted to be touched. You moaned a variety of curses into his mouth as he explored, and when you were forced to break away with a “Sherlock, *God*,” he could safely assume that he’d succeeded in making you lose your mind.

In truth, you also felt victorious. With each time he pushed into you, you could visibly see Sherlock Holmes become a little more undone. You could read each equation, formula, and fact slipping out of his eyes as his breathing grew more ragged. He was losing it, not permanently, but for now you two were completely equal in the way that you were human beings, as close as you could physically be. And with a twinge of pride, you knew that *you* were the sole person responsible for this. It was *your* name he was saying over and over as if he depended on it… it was *you* he was watching, lust-dazed, as he fought to keep himself in some degree of control.

You were guiltlessly less restrained. The sight of Sherlock tumbling over the edge sent you over it as well. It came as a thundering wave, starting at your thighs and crashing down over your entire body. God! It had never felt this good before, no, you’d never felt like whiting out before. Lost completely in pleasure, in the hazy perfume of sweat and hot breath on your neck. Sherlock was cursing up a storm, which told you that he, too, was a goner: he spilled out inside of you, he fucking *filled* you. You were just amazed at the fact that you could stay balanced like that when your mind was on another plane of existence. And it would be some time later before you could regain your senses…

You did not deserve a parade: you deserved a national holiday in your name.

“Sherlock Holmes, did I give you a religious conversion?”

“What’s that?”

“I could have sworn a couple of not-ironic ‘Oh, God’s throughout.”

“I can’t quite recall…”

"That's a compliment to me."

In truth, you *did* prove something to him. Sherlock would have probably placed physical love at the bottom rung of the ladder of importance. He never gave thought to it, and why should he? But now he understood just why it meant so much to other people, and why it should mean something to him. There was something to be said for having you that close, that connected. He had treated lust as a sort of chemical equation, and he had been proved wrong. No, it was far more complicated than that–he could even understand where poets came from. And making love did seem to have its inspirational qualities, since his mind felt completely rejuvenated…

And you, well, you had never questioned the importance of such matters. You were fascinated by simpler things. Like lying in bed with Sherlock Holmes, hearing him fall asleep, but not quite, as he tangled himself up with you. Waiting until he was far enough out to where you could lean over and rest your head on him and hear not silence, nor the noise of cogs and gears, but a slow, steady heartbeat that played out like a solo for you through the night.

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## Chapter 26: Io de' sospiri

**Author's Notes:** next time: rea-tan in buckingham palace with less favorable circumstances and just about as much dress as Sherlock
also, rea-tan's first experience with irene! hooray

~~going to take some artistic liberties here and say that she's wearing the purple shirt of sex~~

---

It was very new for him–to sleep so deeply and contentedly that when he woke, his mind felt as clear as a cloudless sky. Getting a full night's rest was so unusual that he actually felt more disoriented than if he had slept four or five hours, which was common when he was in the middle of a case. He woke slowly, slowly, reminding himself that he was in your room and your bed… but as he gradually took in his surroundings, he noticed that something was missing.

You were gone, oh, you were lost! The space beside him was cold. You'd been gone, and gone awhile… and even though you were a late sleeper (a fact he was always willing to bring up when you struggled into work in the morning), it was past noon and you had work to do, but he didn't know that yet. Right now he was balancing himself between *she's left* and *this is her flat and that makes a difference, doesn't it?*

The bedroom door was ajar and your cat had found his way in. He gave Sherlock a sort of up-and-down stare, full of criticism, before withdrawing and padding down the hallway. Somehow that was motivation enough to get up, and Sherlock finally rolled out of bed and dressed himself enough to look through your house. (But where did his shirt go?)

It was completely silent, which served to make him more anxious as to your whereabouts. You didn't have work today and he wasn't sure that you had anyone to visit, so where were you? He didn't expect you to leave, actually: "flee" would be a better term. Oh, yes, he must have disappointed you somehow, just like how he disappointed everyone… It was what he had not quite feared, but dreaded and somewhat anticipated…

But that was only a momentary sort of feeling, because Sherlock found you as soon as he turned into your kitchen. You were sitting in a rather unladylike position at the table, doing a crossword puzzle while wearing nothing but your undergarments and his shirt. (There's where it went…) When you heard him approach, you smiled without looking up and continued with your work.

"Good morning," you greeted. "I'm sorry about taking your shirt. It was cold and you're not going to get it back until I finish this."

He stooped low to kiss your hair, his greeting to you, and told you that "Four down is 'Bergman.'"

"What! I knew that one."

"And forty-nine across is 'Pisces' and not 'Cancer' which makes your other answer not 'Chanel' but 'Persol.'"

"What! I got my own zodiac wrong! I thought Cancer had the fish…"

"Twenty-eight down is 'Ignatius.'"

"Okay… I didn't know that one. You got me."

You drew your legs down and let them swing idly as you stared at the crossword puzzle. It occurred to you that Sherlock had probably solved all of it already, and you sighed.

"I got up early to get it done before you could see it, too…"

"I have no real interest in it, regardless."

Your mouth twitched into a smile. "No, you just like to point out when I'm wrong."

He smiled in that way that told you *yes, you're completely accurate*, but you did find it hard to stay too mad at him, especially when he was without a shirt and still had bedhead.

"You know, Sherlock, I didn't expect you to be such an octopus in your sleep… not unpleasant, might I add. It's quite nice situation to have to wriggle out of."

You returned to your crossword, hurrying to get it done before Sherlock pointed anything else out. He was still staring at you, but you weren't looking up and you didn't notice–so therefore it was a bit of a surprise to hear, "Take it off now."

"I told you, I'm cold and I'm keeping it for the moment."

"Not just that. Everything, I mean."

"I–"

You looked up in surprise and realized that he meant it, oh, he *meant it*.

"A-Absolutely," you stammered. "This table's a little hard, though, I think I want to go back to bed."

Later, much later, you returned to Sherlock's flat with him. John couldn't believe it at all. He wondered if you two spent the whole night, um, getting acquainted with each other's intelligences or becoming academically closer… yes. No alternative. There was nothing else Sherlock could have done in your flat all night, nope, and there was definitely none of that after-sex glow about him…

"You… *you* didn't come home last night," he noted aloud anyway as Sherlock stood across from him and you sat in the chair.

"How observant of you, John. If you recall, she needed me at a rather late time."

"Yes, I know that, you ran right over."

Sherlock scrutinized him. "Am I not supposed to go see my fiancée at her request? I'd think that you would espouse such a principle."

John was not going to rebuke or accuse Sherlock of sleeping with you or anything–that was between the two of you, and besides, he was more or less glad that *any* woman would want such a thing. So he wasn't upset, he was just incredulous and he could hardly wrap his mind around it.

"Well, um… good." John shrugged. "Good for you, I mean."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I mean… oh, God, never mind. Coffee?"

"Yes, please," you replied with a smile. "I'm sorry, though… could you go get it for me?"

John obliged and brought some back for you. Okay, so this was fine… it's not like you two were the type to go on about your sexual experiences. It wasn't in your nature! It would go on like normal… in fact, he could even forget about it, if he repressed the thought enough…

"Thank you!" you exclaimed when he brought it back. And then, without thinking, you said: "Sorry, it's just a bit hard to walk."

Whooops. John actually did drop his own cup, and it would have broken if you hadn't anticipated it.

"I mean, um, I slept funny… no, wait, I mean that I fell down some stairs… yeah. And now my leg hurts. John, don't look at us like that! John? John–"

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## Chapter 27: Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro

**Author's Notes:** I'm happy because next arc is Rea-tan's own arc! We'll finally get to hear Stanley's story yayy
I've got it bad for Stanford Stanley though, mostly because I've unofficially cast Ryan Phillippe to play him

but first we've got to suffer some
and trust me, in the irene arc they've got to suffer a lot more
suffering ahaHAHAHAHA IT SUSTAINS ME

---

You usually hated the morning–rolling out of a perfectly good, warm bed to face a stupid and disagreeable day. But there were something to be said for mornings like these… the sheets were just the right temperature… it was early enough to roll over and go back to sleep… you could hear the beeping of cabs and the occasional shout coming from outside… and you could damn well ignore it all because much more interesting was the feel of Sherlock's stomach pressing against yours, hips slamming together, you getting lost in a haze of utter transcendence followed by Sherlock's muttered curses announcing his end–

"Hmm," you muttered against his neck as he caught his breath. "What time is it?"

"Does it matter?"

"To me, no… but I thought that you have a case today."

Sherlock's fame had increased exponentially due to John's blog, and you couldn't be more proud of the two of them. People lauding Sherlock somehow made you feel giddy in turn, and you enjoyed the number of cases he was getting as a result (although you occasionally moped over his absence). The only downside was that the media had easily connected you to him as his fiancée, and although they usually left you alone (since you never did anything noteworthy), you did have one occasion of a paparazzi member lying in wait outside of your flat, probably trying to get a photo of you inviting Sherlock inside. You'd been alone and incredibly disgruntled, and you'd panicked at the sight of a dark, hulking form crouched by the gate, so you didn't hesitate to gift him with a haymaker to the side of the head. This led to a glorious misinterpretation that Sherlock was using you to get rid of the reporters, and you were dubbed (almost affectionately) a "warrior"–a violent mercenary, a bodyguard… they couldn't decide. The only thing for certain was that the victim had managed to get a good shot of you clocking him upside the head, with you looking oddly photogenic as you did so, and Sherlock had been so quietly proud of it that he clipped it out and hung it up somewhere.

"That case, ah… yes, very dull, probably obvious. John's out and I'm staying home for it."

"Oh, then don't keep him waiting for it! If you told me, then I wouldn't have distracted you."

"Far from it… helps me think."

You raised a brow. "So when you… you know… it *helps*?"

“Indeed. Imperative in solving that boring case about the pastor and the deaf woman.”

“Well! I know that you’re a big fan of my arse, but I didn’t think that it had extraneous benefits.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I don’t favor any one specific body part.”

“Sherlock, if my arse had a fanclub you'd be its president. Wow! Your hand’s on it *right now*.” You hummed and look towards the door. “Isn’t your client still here, by the way?”

“Oh, he’s an idiot.”

“Now, don’t leave John to do it all… go and hurry back.”

He didn’t bother dressing for the occasion, and as he wrapped himself up in sheets you reveled in the joy of having the bed all to yourself. It was still a little early, so you dozed off for a little while, finding no reason why you shouldn’t…

…and you woke to strange men in the bedroom.

“Wow.” You stared at all of them. “Can I help you?”

“That must be his fiancée,” one determined. “Get his clothes and get her–she could be useful.”

“What! Who the fuck do you think you are?”

You didn’t have the immediate deductive skills that Sherlock possessed, and even if you did you were too groggy to utilize them, so you assumed they were hostile. You kicked up a fuss, which they ignored until you reached for your SIG Sauer, and *then* they decided to go into offensive mode.

“She’s aggressive! Get the handcuffs!”

“Get those *away* from me!”

But they were determined to believe that you were antagonistic, so you found yourself handcuffed to the biggest man and dragged along to follow them. You had no idea where you were going and none of them were telling you despite your fatigued threats and bitching and *how do you expect me to hold this sheet up with just one hand?*

You shut up once you realized that you were being brought to Buckingham Palace. Needless to say, you were less than pleased, especially since they all wouldn’t even give you a second glance… rather, you sat in an incredibly elaborate chair as your new, stoic best friend refused to let you out of the handcuffs until further orders… orders that never seemed to arrive.

“Can you tell me why I’m here?” you asked him after a while, deciding to play the polite game.

“No.”

“Wow! Well, can you tell me why my fiancé’s here?”

“My employer is in need of his service.”

“About what?”

“That’s none of your concern.”

“Look, I’m in Buckingham Palace in nothing but a bedsheet. The least you could do is tell me *something*!”

He sweated a bit. He was new to this whole deal, and was acquainted with you only through your reputation from the media–your reputation as being a violent, trigger-and-fist-happy warrior who castrated anyone who caught you on a bad day. Really, you were just disgruntled and in need of an explanation, but you *were* ready to punch someone, even royalty, if you weren’t informed of why you’d been dragged out.

After much too long, you were finally graced with the face of your fiancé, who looked surprised to see you sitting there–your sheet wrapped around you like a queen’s robe, your face filled with all the icy annoyance and tested self-composure of a foreign princess.

“Sherlock!” you exclaimed. “What am I doing here?”

“I’m afraid your guess is as good as mine. You, there–just why is she here, and *why* did you feel the need to handcuff her?”

“She…” Your partner cleared his throat. “We had reason to believe that she would have attempted violence if we didn’t restrain her.”

“Just because I keep a gun on the nightstand!” you supplemented helplessly. “They bundled me up and handcuffed me… my wrist hurts now… they weren’t even polite about it.”

Sherlock glared wordlessly at your companion for a while before saying, “The next day you decide to manhandle my fiancée will be your last, although I’m not sure which of us will give the executing blow. Now, *you*, weren’t you compelled to *dress* yourself?”

“They didn’t even give me the opportunity… but it’s not like I’d be able to.” You lowered your voice to a hiss. “*Someone* thought it prudent to rip my skirt off last night.”

“Then it shouldn’t have been such a bother to get off. And it was simply need-based, as it had been a while since I’d seen you–”

“Try two days, Sherlock!”

“Long enough…”

That was enough to get your companion to finally release you from your handcuffs, and at Sherlock’s wordless command, he guiltily chafed your wrist until you felt better (or, at least, less disgraced).

Sherlock told you that he needed to visit someone–some woman–and you trudged off to get some work done before he came back (or, rather, until John came back, since John told the best stories). Apparently you came back at a bad time, though–Sherlock was drugged and Lestrade was telling you that he had some video to show you later.

“What happened to him?” you asked John. “I was told he was acting like a bloody mess, and I come back here to find him passed out.”

“Oh, well… the woman… the woman we were meeting, that is. Irene Adler. Took it upon herself to drug him with something… she said he should be fine in a few hours. He’s not making a lot of sense right now, but if you want to see him…”

Of course you did–you just weren’t mentally prepared for what you were going to find. John seemed to not want to tell you something, although you couldn’t fathom just what. When you entered his room, you found him half-conscious in his bed, still disoriented. When he saw you it took several tries to pronounce your name correctly, which allowed you to fully estimate his mental bearings.

“Just lie down,” you advised. “You can tell me about it later… Yes, I’m staying. What if you choke on your own vomit? That’s happened to a lot of people…”

As Sherlock drifted in and out of consciousness, you sat there and softly hummed something Stravinsky as you watched him. Something in the room was bothering you, but when you looked all around, you couldn’t figure it out. Your best guess was over by the door, so you stood and examined Sherlock’s coat. It was on the other side of the door and right in your face when you entered, and something about it seemed off to you, although you weren’t sure what just yet. You inspected it, poked and prodded, but it wasn’t until you put your nose to it and snuffed did you realize just what was completely un-Sherlock about it.

*Woman!* It smelled completely and totally of woman! Perfume, the most feminine perfume… no doubt expensive, nothing *you* could ever afford… But how, how could it be strongest on the *inside* of his coat? “Smells like an affair,” your mother would sometimes accuse at your father, although this was only because your father had briefly been a perfume salesman. An affair… Of course not, but still…

You left the room for a minute and confronted John, who was a little helpless and not particularly excited about your questions, which he anticipated.

“John,” you asked, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible, “just what was this Irene Adler like?”

“What do you mean?” he replied, attempting to match your tone.

“I don’t know, just… how did she act? What was she like?”

“She seemed… smart, I suppose… outgoing? Sort of cunning. I wouldn’t say ‘pleasant.’”

“I see.” You nodded slowly. “Tell me, John, what was it about the coat?”

“W-What about the coat?”

“You know about the coat. Why does it smell like it’s been all over a lady’s skin?”

He exhaled sharply. “Um, well, yes… I don’t know what to tell you except *don’t take this the wrong way*… because neither of us saw it coming. It was all her ploy, get it? But at the beginning she took it upon herself to greet us, um, stark naked… so I wanted her to put something on and she settled on Sherlock’s coat. Nothing bad!”

“Oh!” But he wasn’t quite sure if it was relieved or relieving. In fact, your gaze seemed colder than ever, directed at some unseen third party as you folded your arms and stared at the wall.

“It had nothing to do with us,” he urged.

“Yes… to be certain, it had nothing to do with either of you.”

You returned to Sherlock’s room, feeling darker than ever. You should have seen it coming that some woman sometime would be attracted to Sherlock, perhaps so much so that she would greet him naked. But, no, John said that she was cunning, so it must have been part of some ploy… that’s what he said, right? You had never been bothered by any of Sherlock’s female clients, but then, you supposed that none of them had ever confronted him in her birthday suit. But it didn’t go any further. Right?

When you opened the door, you found Sherlock still in bed, still needing his rest. You didn’t interrupt him or anything–you merely moved over to where he was lying and stood over him, looking a little too much like an angel of death as you looked him up and down. By the time he could properly adjust his gaze on you, he found you staring at something on his face.

“What is it?” he mumbled.

“Sherlock, you really do know just about everything about me–how I dress, I mean.”

“What?”

“So you should know… that is, I’m certainly still aware…”

You left for a moment and returned. You had soaked your handkerchief in water (that was intentionally freezing cold) and were now taking it to his face. Your gaze was about as cold and distant as he’d ever seen it, which gave him a reasonable guess as to what you were wiping off.

“You know, that is… that I don’t wear lipstick…”

You dried him off, the most benevolence you could give him, and then briefly mussed his curls before straightening and moving towards the door once more.

He didn't like that, for some reason–in his current state, you looked as if you were walking such a distance away from him… and it seemed you would never return…

"Where are you going?"

Your smile was a testimony to your mood: you looked as if you'd just been kicked, or rather, you looked like you'd just kicked yourself. "Darling, I'm going home."

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## Chapter 28: Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen

**Author's Notes:** wOW YOU GUYS ARE FANTASTIC um seriously i've never had that many reviews in a row and I know it was probably a one-time thing but it was so lovely i love you but sorry about this fucking doorbuster chapter *it was Stanley's arc okay*

and it's bad manners for authors to gush over their chapters and this one's all right but i thought it did well for showing how sherlock feels about his lady and just ugh they still have to suffer

here too

---

The next few days saw you tired and grumpy, although it wasn't like you had no reason to be. Nothing was going right for you, and you were just so frustrated that you wanted to hibernate for the rest of the fall.

It had nearly been a month since the incident with–shall we say–*the other woman*, and you didn't even want to talk about it. The woman was texting him, and frequently, and for some reason his alert sound was… less than artistic. You often had the urge to either simply change it or throw the entire phone into a raging river, but you knew that it wouldn't solve any problems. According to John('s blog), Sherlock was indeed interested in this Adler woman, and you couldn't figure out *why* because neither of them would tell you anything about her–John out of fear that you'd kill somebody, and Sherlock out of reasoning that Irene Adler had nothing to do with you. And you knew that Irene Adler had nothing to do with you, but for all the months that you accepted the fact that Sherlock's cases were his own private business, you simply could not deal with *this* now…

You had regressed and were now exercising your avoidance maneuvers again. You hardly saw Sherlock in that late September and early November, and when you did, it was not hard to note that you kept as far away from him as possible. But to your credit, it wasn't simply because you were upset over that whole brief Irene affair–you had bigger problems, *much* bigger problems than a woman interested in your fiancé.

Your fears had escaped paranoia and broke through the gates of reality: Stanford Stanley was back in your life. Not just in his usual old subtle ways, like seeing him out of the corner of your eye at a store or a busy street. No! He wasn't even trying to conceal himself, now… he wasn't even trying to be nonchalant or enigmatic. When you saw him on the street, he stared at you, and occasionally, when you were on your own, he followed you a little way until you practically ran into an area with witnesses.

You knew what you'd promised yourself–you knew that you would have to fulfill it soon. You'd been waiting for it for years. Such a confrontation was inevitable, and you knew it would be unpleasant. Oh, Stanford Stanley! The alpha and the omega of your anxiety, your sleeplessness, your neglect of a certain fiancé! You owed it to yourself to do away with him, yes, it was your destiny and the only destiny you had. He was your Moriarty and you simply couldn't survive if he remained on this planet. Your only question was *why now…?* Why had he waited so long? He had been latent for years, going missing, reappearing, staying far out of anyone's view. You hardly saw him, aside from hallucinations when you were deprived of sleep, and even then he only ever glanced at you before retreating… so why now?

You guessed that it was time.

Your sudden disquiet, as usual, went unnoticed but for one man: the same man who didn't let it slide the first time that he saw you losing sleep and avoiding him. Sherlock had seen you only once in that state, and that time, you had given him only one explanatory word: *Stanley*. And now you had returned to an imbalanced state, and he could only assume that your plight had reappeared. Once more you wouldn't tell him anything–once more you were determined to carry it by yourself. That should be *his* job, though, not yours… he did not want to load his problems onto you and he did *not* want you getting into anything involving Moriarty, but he had enough space so that he could help you out, just a bit…

But you were avoiding him, which happened only at specific times: you weren't opposed to calling him out when you felt he and only *he* did something wrong, and you were also open to admitting your own mistakes as long as he didn't continuously bring them up. But you avoided him when and only when you were as angry with him as you were at yourself, and the impasse left you creating your own isolation. And what was he to do? He had never seen you like this before–before was bad, and now this was worse. He had to do *something*, even give the most minimal of efforts, yes, *something* was needed… So how could he bait you over?

Ah, yes…

*John needs you over. —SH*

*What for?*

*Don't know, some boring reason. —SH*

*Can't you just tell me over text so I don't have to rush all the way over there?*

*No. He needs you over. —SH*

*Are you absolutely certain?*

And then, a while after: *I need you over. —SH*

So you went.

Upon arriving at 221B, you found no burning building, hostage situation or rat infestation, so you genuinely wondered what John could have needed you over for. The man was pretty well-equipped to handle most situations, although occasionally he got busy and needed you to deal with Sherlock for him.

"I'm here," you called, finding Sherlock in front of the fire and John at the kitchen table. You knew that Sherlock could read the stress in your face, and since you weren't aware that he knew about it already you sidled over to the kitchen and avoided him entirely.

"Hey, John. What's the matter?"

He seemed surprised to see you–with the look on his face, you would have thought that he hadn't even known you were coming! Except, then…

"Oh! You're here! When did you–? It's strange, it's just, I was thinking about you a minute ago… What're you here for?"

"You didn't… *Oh*." You nodded slowly. "Well, did you need me for something anyway?"

"It's no big deal, really… just doing this crossword puzzle and, um, I didn't know this one and I thought you would–Puccini opera, five letters, third letter 's.'"

"Ah! *Tosca*."

"Thank you, that helps."

You retreated and went back to where Sherlock was sitting. He wasn't looking at you–he hadn't looked at you when you'd first walked in, either–and you were so tired that you just wanted to leave, but Sherlock *had* said that he needed you over, too… did that still stand?

"Sit down," he told you, still not looking up. "You've come all the way here."

You plopped down across from him, unnecessarily guarded, and looked him over. Only now did he look over to you, and you knew that he was reading you–your anxiety, lack of sleep, worry, skipped meals and comfort eating. In that moment you did want to tell him everything, just so he wouldn't assume, but you knew what he would think of you when you did…

"Something's the matter."

"Very observant of you, Sherlock."

"One day you will have to tell me what's bothering you, and I would rather be told today. I'm not particularly fond of being left in the dark."

"It's not a big deal, okay?" You squirmed in your seat. "What do you even care? I mean, no, that's mean, but you never care about problems about people like me. You'll probably think it's really common."

"Your anxiety at the moment is astounding," he replied, although for your benefit he didn't elaborate. "You're also telling me that I won't care about your problems after I've asked you twice. If I didn't care I wouldn't have asked you in the first place."

"I mean it. It's nothing worth your time."

"Tell me," he repeated, "please."

Damn! He knew exactly where your weak points were. Hearing Sherlock ask for *anything* made you feel so guilty that you were about to tell him everything, but you steeled yourself with the resolution that you never wanted Sherlock Holmes and Stanford Stanley to become involved with each other.

"You're being a hypocrite! You won't even tell me about that woman who texts you all the time."

"That's not a problem, that's a non-issue."

"*You* don't think it is, but *I* think it is! She met you while she was *naked*!"

He leaned forward. "And it's a non-issue because I don't care about her, which should be obvious. But what's more obvious is that I'm concerned about you, and the fact that I'm even admitting it should prove at least *something* to you. Now tell me why you look like you haven't slept in two days."

"A day and a *half*."

"Well, it's been a while since I've seen you."

You shifted uncomfortably and sighed. The weight of Stanford Stanley's existence suddenly pressed down on you, and you became aware of the fact that you had to tell *somebody* about him. You didn't have to ask for Sherlock's help or anything, but it couldn't really hurt to at least give him the basic facts, right? And it *was* difficult to do everything but yourself, so you weren't sure how Sherlock could ever do it… but still–

"Will you think worse of me, if I told you?"

"Why would you assume I'd do that?"

"Because you do it to everyone!"

"Hm, true. But you're not sure, are you?"

You sighed again, this time more deeply, and really looked at him for the first time. No, he didn't look like he was about to mock you… he didn't look like he was impatiently waiting to find fault with you. And you really did wonder if Sherlock was at least minimally concerned about you.

"It would take a long time."

"I have time."

“John’s here.”

“Ah, I see. John?”

From the next room over: “What is it, Sherlock?”

“Are you there?”

“Yes…”

“Then don’t be.”

John sighed, sort of used to it already, and moved to his room. (You’d have to remember to buy him a new jumper, later) Sherlock stared at you once more as the cogs turned in your mind and you realized that you’d have to make a decision.

And your decision was, well–to trust your fiancé.

“Remember, though, you can’t think badly of me over it.”

“You seem unaware of the fact that such a thing would be very hard to accomplish.”

Now you took several deep breaths, to collect all of the thoughts you had over Stanford fucking Stanley. It was a long story, technically, and you weren’t fond of it, but once you got started you found yourself unable to leave anything out…

“So it was a while ago–some years ago. I worked with this other police force, led by this man, Detective Inspector Esterhase… from what they said, he was competent, but I never really got any evidence to prove that. He was sentimental, *really* sentimental, but he had this power complex–and really, I think he only wanted the job because of some crime show. I’d worked with him for a while, and I didn’t have too many problems with him… half the time he disregarded anything I said, but hey, it’s not like I have a job that demands respect from everyone. Usually I’m an afterthought, something for the hindsight bias to work with. He didn’t think my job was a ‘real’ job and he didn’t like how young I was anyway, but there was nothing really for me to do about it.

“I remember the day it happens–they say everyone has one case and I guess it counts for someone who’s not even police. It was in the summer, and it had rained the moment we got the call. We got called that a woman had fallen out of the window of her flat. Some said it was a murder, others a suicide, others an accident, but we wouldn’t know until we went there, right? So we went there and she’s on her back, an awful mess, lots of passersby staring at her. Her husband’s in the flat, but for now I’m staring at this body. Esterhase came back and said it’s not a murder. And I thought it was pretty simple, you know–how the fuck could it *not* be a murder if she’s flat on her back? Who falls out of a window backwards? And he tells me that it can’t be a murder because there were people walking down the street and they didn’t hear any yelling. How could it be a murder if there was no violent struggle? I said, well, there didn’t *have* to be. Maybe she was looking out the window and was surprised? And he said that it was a suicide and I thought that was stupid, too… if you want to commit suicide, you don’t flip backwards out of a window, and you don’t do it from a window on the first floor. I’ll be honest in that I was looking for a murderer… I *wanted* a murderer. But you have to look at it, right? How couldn’t this be a murder?

“So we found the husband–Stanley was his name. He’s really particular about his name and I have no idea why… he just hates being called the wrong name. When we found him he was all teary and shaking–he looked like a little scared puppy. Had the face of one, too… the girls in the investigative team all fell over him. He was all skinny and ruffled and he looked just pathetic. I guess he was attractive, but I’ll be honest when I say that, at the time, I had it bad for a male secretary who was twice my age, so I was too infatuated to care about Stanley. He said that his wife was murdered, that he wasn’t the perpetrator, that when he’d walked in, he’d been shoved aside and the real killer had escaped.

“I was suspicious… only because it just *sounded* strange. Too convenient. He gave a pretty rough description of the murderer, sort of vague, and Esterhase believed him completely. We asked around to see if anyone had spotted someone trying to escape, we gave the description, and nobody agreed… so I thought we were onto something, but then at the last minute the landlord ran up and told us that, yes, he’d seen somebody try to escape. Not two minutes after, we got a call saying that someone had confessed to the murder.

“I was shocked and sort of pissed. Who confesses to a murder not an hour after it’s happened? After he shoved a husband away to escape and who apparently fled so quickly that nobody actually saw him, except for one shaky thing by a landlord? So I say to Esterhase, ‘You only think it’s a murder now? You were convinced that it wasn’t just before, when we only had Stanley. And now that there’s another suspect, we can suddenly count Stanley out?’ And he told me that I was being unfair, that there was no proof against Stanley, and that I was somehow biased against him. And was I? Maybe, a little. I was new and I thought everyone was a criminal… but Sherlock, you have to believe me. I was really, really put-off by this Stanley guy. He was different around me. Around the rest of the team he was jittery, antsy, really pathetic and pitiful. But when it was just me, or when I watched him when no one was around, he was pretty normal… very intelligent. I thought he was playing with us.

“So I interviewed Stanley, not an interrogation or anything, just so I could get a profile on him and his wife. He tells me he’s been everywhere… he’d lived in England most of his life, but he’s lived in the States for a while, and then in Germany when he married his wife, then Scotland and Norway and then finally returned to England. He claimed to have worked in a factory, but I couldn’t get any reliable confirmation on it… but the moment I told Esterhase to look into it, we had proof of work flowing in. I couldn’t believe it... It just didn’t make sense to me. But he went through the whole spiel, told me everything and it was practically textbook. He loved his wife, spoke about her in the present tense, admitted to some problems, all that. I interrogated him about where he was when his wife was out the window, but he couldn’t give me a quality answer… but, again, within time an airtight alibi was brought in. A whole restaurant claimed that they saw Stanley there! And he said he’d been in a bookstore. I was upset–there really was something wrong with this guy. I thought so. But I had absolutely no proof… he seemed like a stand-up sort of man, loved his wife so much that he said he’d never get married again, all that.

“So I turned off the tape recorder and everyone left. I stayed a little while to put things away, and he asks if he can leave. It’s Esterhase’s job for that, and he’s already moved to tears about Stanley’s testimony. Sentimental, like I said. He’d had a pregnant wife at home and hearing some man gush about his wife was too much. So he let Stanley go home, which I thought was just awful, but I couldn’t do anything about it. Esterhase just told me, ‘Oh, you’ve got something against the poor man. Let him go.’ We look over and Stanley’s sobbing like a bitch. But I *saw* him, Sherlock. I saw him through the window as we talked–through a mirror that was on the wall, something that was telling us to smile at it and we’d feel better. And I looked through it and I see Stanley–and he’s got the tears in his eyes, but his face had gone all cold. An actor who’d just finished the scene. But when I turned the other way–I could hardly believe it–he was crying again, and I said, you know, fine.

“I go back in to get my nice fountain pen and it’s just me and Stanley. No tape recorder, no police, nothing. He looks at me and asks if I think he killed his wife. And I figure, oh, I can’t do anything about it, I’m not even the police. So I tell him ‘yes.’ And he just smiles and says, all wide-eyed, ‘I pushed her out the window, but I didn’t kill her.’

“I’m freaking out, but I’m not letting it show. So I hurry and tell Esterhase, but Esterhase chews me out. ‘You just hate him, you’ve got something against him! He just went on for three hours about how much he loves his wife! Why would he tell *you* for ten seconds that he killed his wife?’ And I’m so pissed that he’s cocking this whole thing up–letting him go, not interrogating him properly, not investigating anything and believing everything that he says without any sort of critical thought. But nobody would listen to me! So I bullied and harangued until I was allowed to visit Stanley’s house in Scotland.

“Nobody came with me and I was actually very scared, all right? This man was just awful for me–he’d tricked everyone with psychological games and all that bullshit, and I wasn’t going to stand for it. So I went–that’s when I first got my SIG Sauer, actually–and I went to interview him under the guise that I was constructing profiles for grieving widows and widowers. He agreed… he was actually very sociable, but I was suspicious. I thought he was trying to manipulate me, and he probably was. I don’t think he actually liked *anyone*, although he did seem to like his wife. Still, the more he was talking, the more he resembled someone with antisocial personality disorder. He had a dog but it died ‘by accident’–it was implied that he killed it. Had no deep friendships, and people didn’t actually seem too close to him… they liked him without really knowing why. I kept going but I couldn’t get anything out of him, and he didn’t say anything else about his wife’s murder. I need to go wash my hands, so I ask him where the loo was, and he gives me directions. It’s a pretty substantial house, and honestly, I got lost. I went to the wrong room, I went to the basement and–Sherlock, you have to believe me. He had bodies in his house. Bodies! Various states of decay. Smelled absolutely awful. Some looked strangled, others bludgeoned, some he had hanging in nooses from the ceilings. It looked like a marketplace for bodies… all neatly stacked up like I was supposed to purchase them.

“I panic, but I don’t let it show because Stanley hadn’t known that I found that place. I’m freaking out and I say, thank you for your time and everything, you’ve helped out a lot. He smiles at me and says that it was his pleasure… I remind myself of how calm he was when it was just me and him. He didn’t need to pretend like he was a mess, because he knew I didn’t believe it. So I get the hell out of there and call up Esterhase, and for a half-hour I’m trying to convince him that Stanley’s got corpses in his basement. But Esterhase won’t believe me, and it takes another half-hour before he bothers to do anything. Two days later he sends someone out to investigate his house, but by then the basement’s empty, scrubbed clean. They thought I was crazy. I thought I was crazy. Stanley was crying, again.

“So someone else had already confessed to the murder of Mrs. Stanley–but he’d never actually given any details or motivations. He claims that she was there during a robbery, but it didn’t add up. Why would she be sitting at the window if someone was breaking in? Why would she just sit there if a stranger entered the room, and why wouldn’t she put up a fight? The window was open, so why didn’t she scream or call for help? And nothing was stolen, at least, not until *after* he’d said that he was there to rob–and then necklaces mysteriously vanished. Before the trial, though, he hung himself, and as they say, that’s the end of that. Esterhase refused to investigate anything… he took it at face value. I wasn’t even allowed to mention Stanley’s name again, and eventually I moved and got a job with New Scotland Yard. Thank God–I couldn’t deal with another investigation like that. I never officially saw Stanley again, but I see him now and again in public places–not like he isn’t allowed to be there. But, Sherlock, you have to believe me, all right? He’s a madman, but an intelligent madman. He can create alibis and proof at will! He manipulated everyone on that team except me and then the investigation was ruined. I’m not crazy, I know it. He’s a murderer and a weasel, and… oh, lately I keep seeing him, over and over. More than should be normal. I think he’s coming for me–and I’ll accept it. All the other criminals I’ve met for profiling have been, well, textbook. He’s better than that–he knows what I was to be looking for. He could invent anything he wanted–like Edward Norton in that one film, you know? And I think I’m supposed to confront him, sometime. And I will, Sherlock. I’m going to have to. I’ll kill him and it’ll be in self-defense. Do you get me?”

Sherlock had been silent during your story, staring at you carefully over his bridged fingers. He had been listening to you sincerely, never interrupting you and only asking you questions for clarification. You'd noticed how carefully he'd been paying attention to you... he didn't even so much as make an expression that he didn't believe you, or worse, thought you were an idiot or liar. He pondered your words and weighed them out thoughtfully. You were holding your breath.

“Sherlock–do you believe me?”

After a moment he told you, “Yes, I believe you.” And he meant it, and you could tell–he wasn’t mocking you at all.

“So you don’t think I’m crazy or paranoid, or anything?”

“Far from it. Rather, I think you’re the only one in that investigation who wasn’t swept away by idiocy or sentiment. I’m sickeningly proud.”

“It doesn’t matter now, though… the case is closed as far as everyone is concerned.” You sighed and moved over to him, flopping down on his lap. You needed some affection and he knew it–he massaged your scalp as he continued to think your story over.

“And you see this Stanley all the time, do you?”

“Lately, yes.” You closed your eyes and recalled all the times you saw him where he shouldn’t be. “I have to confront him, Sherlock. He’s as close to an archenemy as a person can have. I’m responsible for it… I should have done more.”

“You weren’t in a position of power to do more.”

“I know, but I still feel guilty. I *knew* something was wrong and I let it go... I didn't do enough, I didn't call enough people, I didn't kick up enough of a fuss... I didn't shoot him the first time I was in his house. I owe it to his wife and those people in his basement. But why, though? Who did he need to kill? I never understood it… I never understood him. And I’ll have to face him, someday. He’s after me and I don’t know why, but if I die, it’ll be fine. Just as long as I kill him first.”

Sherlock stopped. “Don’t say that.”

“I mean it, though.”

“Don’t say that,” and then, “*Please* don’t say that. It’s unnecessary.”

“At this point I think it’s the only way to get rid of him. He’s manipulated everyone else in power.” You looked up at him. “Sherlock, I’m sorry I was avoiding you the last weeks or so. I mean it. I love you and I don’t want you to have to deal with these sorts of problems.”

He looked at the ceiling. “Doing everything by yourself… in this sort of relationship, both parties shouldn’t attempt something along those lines... don't trouble yourself all the time. It will age you.”

“I can take care of it… please don’t involve yourself with him.” You tugged at his shirt. “I don’t want you to get mixed up with Stanley. There wouldn’t even be anything for you to do…”

He was a bit reluctant, but he did say, “If you insist, then I won’t. But if you feel threatened, it’s incredibly unwise to continue on as if nothing is wrong.”

“I can’t do anything, for now… and Stanley isn’t doing anything. But it’s approaching. I’ll be fine, Sherlock, believe me. I won’t die, that was a hyperbole. But you'd figure it out right away, wouldn't you?”

He was looking down at you now, and you leaned forward to kiss him–the first time you’d kissed him in almost a week and a half. And he wanted to say *I’m here to support you* but he couldn’t say something like that, so he kissed you back and thought that was enough–and it did tell you something.

“I’d best be off now… I haven’t fed my pets all day.” You smiled and got up. “Love you. I’ll see you later, all right?”

“Yes,” he replied mutely, and watched you leave. Once more he found something odd in your departure, but this time he wasn’t sure what it was. There was nothing to convince him that you wouldn’t be back again, opening the door loudly, calling greetings to Mrs. Hudson and John, giving him a kiss on the top of the head as you told him about how obvious some one-time killer you talked to had been, right before sitting down across from him and begging him to play some opera for you. But you did not return.

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## Chapter 29: Donde lieta uscì

**Author's Notes:** i actually had all those noodle incidents planned out
except i ended up cutting them out of the story to lessen filler
*i really did like the one about the crippled woman though* edit; OH GOD I THINK I ACCIDENTALLY PUT THIS UP TWICE JESUS SHIT SORRY

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It was understandable that your absence went unnoticed, at first. Even at your happiest it wasn't uncommon at all for you to go a day or two without seeing or even calling Sherlock due to work, distraction or sheer human forgetfulness. Sherlock, however, refused to be pacified by this. It had been two whole days since he'd heard from you, and usually by the second day you called him up in a panicked flurry and apologized for "neglecting" him. And you had left on an amicable note, so he had no reason to believe that you were avoiding him again…

He shifted uncomfortably and recalled what you'd told him before. *Stanley.* Of course *you* would forget to give the man's full name. But still, what an innocuous and almost harmless name it was! No doubt it had helped him in his testimony. Regardless, he was quite clearly the bane of your existence, and now, days after revealing everything, you had seemingly dropped off the face of London…

Sherlock was growing exhausted by your absence, but he was not quite sure if this was the point when he needed to start desperately calling you and knocking on the door to your flat. Is that what people did? He wasn't sure, so he stayed at 221B, staring at his wall for approximately three hours in wait for you. He had attempted to play his violin to clear his thoughts, or at least distract himself, but he could only play songs that reminded him of you, and he was so disgusted with himself that he found silence to be much preferable.

John arrived sometime after two and told Sherlock that he really needed to *stop* leaving organs in unmarked jars in the fridge, because he definitely brought the wrong thing over to his girlfriend's house! not only that, but had he even gotten *started* on that case or had he just been staring at the wall since he's been gone? and by the way, had he spoken to you recently?

And Sherlock answered glumly that, no, he hadn't.

"Oh, well, I thought so," John remarked, looking puzzled. "See, I went over to her flat, and I wasn't sure if she was gone or if she'd just stayed over, because I think I saw mail slipped under her door… and she wasn't answering, so I figured she was at work."

So you haven't been at home. But that could be anything… for once in your life you might have gone out early. Or maybe you'd been rushing out the door and forgotten to pick your things up, yes…

Within the next ten minutes he got a call from Lestrade, once more asking if he'd seen you recently. And with another "no" he found out that you hadn't been coming to work, which was incredibly rare for you, since you often came into work completely sick just so that you could keep working with "your favorite" criminals. Crime scenes were the closest you came to nirvana… So no, you hadn't been to work and you weren't home, and… so…

It took Sherlock more than a minute to compose himself–he realized that he was panicking. You'd disappeared and no one had heard from you–not even him–and you had told him about how stressed you were from seeing your Stanley all the time–you thought something bad would happen–

"Sherlock," John broke in, "are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right. Everything is all right. Why wouldn't I be *all right*?"

"For one, you're going to break your violin if you keep holding it like that…"

Oh–yes, he was holding it so tightly he was about to break it.

"I'm unable to think of anywhere else she could be," Sherlock muttered.

"Have you tried phoning her?"

"She doesn't pick up. I suspect her phone's off."

Thirty minutes later it was John's phone that rang, and as hard as Sherlock tried to not pay attention, he found himself staring and listening, trying to get the whole conversation from John's side alone.

"Yes? Um, no… Really? Yes, I've heard… No, she usually doesn't. No, we haven't. Are you–?" He froze. "You're sure? Oh, God. Yes, of course, he's right here."

Sherlock was staring at the wall again, and did not look up as he extended a hand to accept the phone.

"Lestrade."

"We need you here, right now."

"What's happened?"

"There's been a kidnapping. Well, sort of."

It felt as though his heart was being slammed against his ribs, but–no, he couldn't. He had to think about this logically. Divorce himself from feeling, yes.

"And?"

"Well, there's a bit of a problem. What I mean by 'sort of.' It's not like most kidnapping cases you deal with."

"I don't usually like acquainting myself with the familiar."

"Yes, but this one isn't quite… predictable, I mean. It'll be easier to explain once you're here, but… the kidnapper's been shot, *he's* the one crying, and although the victim seems to have been taken by someone else, they're nowhere to be found and they didn't even phone the police… It's a long story, all right? So come down here."

Sherlock took one deep breath–two–he only allowed himself three before replying. "You don't usually call me for these."

"It's a special case. Sherlock, and if you haven't figured it out–"

"Yes," he said numbly, "it's her."

"Some of her stuff's here, like she dropped it… the kidnapper's not making too much sense, but from what we can gather, your fiancée wasn't being cooperative. So we're a bit concerned because there's a lot of blood a couple of streets over…"

Sherlock let the phone drop slowly, slowly from his hand as he continued staring unblinkingly at the wall.

You'd been shot.

John was staring at him. "Listen, Sherlock, she's out there somewhere. She's probably fine, but we need to go…"

You'd been shot and you were bleeding to death.

"Are you even listening? Your *fiancée* could be in danger!"

You'd been taken, you were dying, you were being tortured and you were bleeding–

"*Sherlock*–"

Sherlock stood so fast that it surprised both of them. "We're leaving."

"Yes, that's what I've been *saying!*"

Sherlock made his way over in something of a blur. He was trying to clear his mind, to get mentally prepared for dealing with this, but his head was fogged by the mere thought of you in trouble. It's not like you were helpless, he knew that–you had saved him from that blind assassin that one time, remember? And you broke that upside-down code because you knew Swedish, and you'd effortlessly threatened men three heads taller than you, and then there was the crippled woman in Sicily who'd stabbed you through the shoulder with a rapier and you just shrugged it off, no pun intended…

But you'd never been shot before, no... and he'd never had to so vividly visualize your pain, since he was not around to experience it firsthand. No, no! He had to *think*, he had to *prepare*. What good could he do if he was muddled around by blind panic? How juvenile, how *incompetent* of him! He was better than that, and he'd have to do better than that for you…

Lestrade hadn't lied about the kidnapper, though–Sherlock saw him first and immediately wondered how he'd managed to get his job in the first place. He had been injured less than romantically, by a bullet to the ass. He was being watched by ~~*oh you're kidding me that fucking*~~ Adam Coveney ~~*why the fuck did* he *have to be on this was Anderson seriously sick again Jesus Christ.*~~ A little ways away was an incredibly disgruntled cabby, who turned out to be the one who phoned the police–to inform them that his cab had been carjacked.

"…and I come back and *this* has happened!" he was crying, gesturing wildly to his out-of-commission cab. "What *happened* to it? I don't have to deal with this, do I?"

Wordlessly, Sherlock stalked over to deduce *something* about the cab–something to keep him sane for the time being. The cab looked depressed–not only was one of its tires flat, but one of its windows had been smashed open. Glass was littered down the street, and behind the cab were skid marks denoting when the kidnapper had panicked and pulled over.

"It was broken from the inside," Sherlock noted, almost to himself. "From the inside…"

"So she got out, then?" John asked. "How'd she manage that?"

Sherlock recalled rifling through your bag months ago, yes–that was it.

"She broke it open with a hammer… in case of flood." His mouth twitched a bit. "Cabby panics and pulls over… she's already climbing out, and as he gets out, she shoots him."

"Oh, yes… a little trigger-happy."

They both turned to the kidnapper, who now and again cried "*my arse*", although no one really paid attention.

"So she wasn't taken, then–she escaped."

Lestrade was skeptical–as to be expected in a situation like this. "So she escaped, and she didn't want to go get help? Where was she going?"

"The blood you found," Sherlock recalled, feeling as though he'd been stabbed at the thought. "You're sure it was hers?"

"Who else's would it be? The kidnapper's right there…"

"And what's he saying?"

"I told you, he's not making sense."

But that didn't stop Sherlock from going over to him and suggesting something so medieval that even Coveney wondered if it was legal for him to even consider it. But it seemed to work, because the kidnapper was reduced to a mess (although he was one already, really) and he began to sputter on and on again.

"The girl, the girl was supposed to be here," he whimpered, finding his vertically challenged self cornered by two tall men. "Where is she? Where's the girl?"

"*You're* asking *us*?" Coveney asked, bewildered. "*You* know! *You* took her!"

"And then she *shot me in the arse*! The girl, *the* girl, she was supposed to help me with the lady–"

"I don't know what he's talking about," Coveney told him, exasperated.

But the wheels were already turning in Sherlock's head, lightning-quick as always, and a bit of the weight on his chest was removed when he realized it–

"*Think* for a minute, will you, Coveney? It's a weighty request for me to ask of you, but do try. There's two there–he had an accomplice. Where's the other?"

"I don't…"

"Of course you *don't*, people like you never *do*." He was already walking away, thinking, deducing, examining and predicting. There was another kidnapper, a girl who wasn't around–she wasn't in the cab with you, she wasn't anywhere nearby… so she must have been lying in wait, waiting, waiting for whatever plot this was to go smoothly. And when you'd ran–it would have been natural for her to–for her to–

Before he could dare think *shoot you*, John was already puzzling over the details, which restored balance to the situation.

"That doesn't make sense though, does it? That she'd so narrowly avoid getting taken, and then she'd run and not get help–but the kidnapper said that there's a girl, too. So was she being chased?"

"They haven't found her anywhere around either of the crime scenes."

"So she might have been taken, again–by this girl."

"Not if she had any bullets left, I'd suspect." But there was a possibility still, some slight possibility…

Within the span of five minutes, Coveney had left to go search for Sherlock's proposed second girl. Although Sherlock would still like to push him down the stairs, he at least was halfway capable, since in no time he'd phoned Lestrade to tell him that he'd found a young woman in the hospital suffering from a gunshot wound she claimed to be self-inflicted, despite the angle being impossible. Apparently she'd been dragged in by a concerned elderly couple, and she was incredible reluctant to be there–but she was even less willing to go along with him. After enough finagling, he'd get her back over…

"Bring her over," Sherlock commanded, not sure he'd have the restraint to resist shooting her–but he supposed that you'd done enough already.

"But that *still* doesn't make any sense," John pointed out. "She wasn't taken by anyone, it seems… so what happened to her? She wasn't chased?"

Sherlock allowed himself just one deep breath this time as he watched the broken glass. He remembered what you'd told him before–"*I'll kill him. I'm going to have to.*" And it looked like today was the day–

"Sherlock," Lestrade asked, exasperated, "just *what* is all this about, anyway? She's yours, isn't she?"

Oh, yes, you were his–only you would shoot two of your kidnappers, mutilate the cab they were taking you in, and then run off to finish it. The first two hadn't been your enemies, they'd been distractions. You hadn't even bothered with them–you could have killed them if you wanted to, yes, you were too accurate for him to believe otherwise. But you'd thought someone else more important, and you were running to him, and despite the fact that you were probably at least mildly injured and overstimulated, you still knew where you were going better than your fiancé did. So where were you going?

"She wasn't chased," Sherlock echoed. "No. She was the one doing the chasing."

True, but–it was also true that even a cornered rat will turn and bite the cat.

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## Chapter 30: Aprite, presto, aprite

**Author's Notes:** well jesus sorry about this
the wait and the product and everything
but at least we'll get the good lady back before too long
well, unless she doesn't die or anything lol

Until Coveney returned with the girl, Sherlock was idle. And he hated being idle more than anything, especially in situations such as helpless as this one. You were missing, and although it was incredibly rare for you to be in danger, you had already confided in him that Stanley was a formidable foe. He had no idea exactly how long you'd been gone, but if you missed your mail, then he could only assume that you'd been gone all morning… unless…

"John," he said suddenly, "we're going."

"What? Where are we going?"

"I have somewhere I need to visit."

John looked over his shoulder uncertainly. "Coveney will be back with the girl soon. Don't you want to wait to talk to her?"

"And you suppose that she'll tell us everything the minute she's confronted with big, frightening policemen? She'll be there when we return. It'll be quick, so you have to hurry."

"Well… all right, but I don't think I quite follow you…"

Your flat was upsettingly close to the scene of the injured cab. Had they really tried to abduct you minutes after you left in the morning? The fact that you're not exactly a morning person hadn't helped them out much.

"I don't get it, though," John told him. "Just why would anyone want to abduct her?"

"John, as usual, you are not at a loss for questions, but at the moment I'm not eager to explain everything to you."

He didn't press it further and assumed it would become obvious later. "What's in her flat, though? You do have a spare key?"

"No," because he'd never had need. Whenever he knocked on the door to your flat, you were always just a few quick footsteps away from letting him in. That, and you didn't yet want him to have unlimited access to your flat, lest he abduct your pets or store a body or whatever.

"She is, however," he continued, "forever occasionally thoughtless. It's necessary for her to keep a spare key around. So…"

On your windowsill was the world's ugliest plant, which you nevertheless were determined to take care of. You were incredibly defensive of it and almost treated it like a pet, but due to present circumstances, he felt absolutely no guilt in taking it and breaking it on the ground.

"Sherlock! What on Earth was that for?!"

"An acceptable loss. One morning she left to get some groceries and forgot her keys. When she returned she had dirt underneath her fingernails…" Sure enough, after sifting through the soil, he found your key.

Both of them expected some minimal signs of struggle or distress, but it seemed that your struggle had not started in your flat. Rather, to Sherlock it seemed incredibly solemn and bland… which wasn't quite your style. There was none of the usual indicators that you had been around–no newspaper strewn over the table, no blankets lying across your furniture, no library books in odd places… in fact, it seemed unchanged from the last time that he'd been there after you tried to clean up for him.

"She feeds her cat regularly, though?" John called from the next room over. "His bowl's empty… litterbox full. He's giving me a stare."

*"I haven't fed my pets all day."* That was days ago. Just how long had you been gone?

It frustrated him that he could find no clues as to your whereabouts. He was in a position where you knew more than him and you were leaving him in the dark–he hated such a position greatly. What a sentimental thing for you to do… make sure everyone was protected, except yourself. It did you no good, yet you insisted upon it.

"Sherlock, come look at this…"

John had returned to your door and had picked up your mail.

"Her mother passed away, did she? That's horrible… I had no idea."

Sherlock was beside him in an instant. "Her mother? What about her mother? You're *sure* it's her mother?"

"Yes, yes. That's what it says on the postcard, right here… hold on… yes. 'We're devastated to hear about the recent loss of your beloved mother. Something about preference towards cremation, consultations, appointments, 'we're open to you at any time.'"

"That can't be right–let me see it."

And he was certain that it couldn't be right because you had told him all about your mother–that she was *brilliant just like you, Sherlock* although *a little sharper* but *I hope* you *never get lady cancer, because that was a bad way for her to leave, all those years ago.*

The postcard was sent from a certain *Pleasant Ends Funeral Home*, a place he did not recognize. He did, however, feel as though he would become acquainted with it shortly.

"She's there. *Pleasant Ends.* Where is it?"

"It shouldn't be too hard to look up…"

Before John could even finish the thought, Sherlock was out the door, making his way back to the first crime scene. He phoned Lestrade to tell him, "Don't bother with the girl."

"Why's that?"

"I know where she's at. Don't bother having her lie to you. That's what people like her do."

"Well, your timing's good. There's no point in it anyway… seems she escaped before she even made it back."

"Escaped from Coveney? Another dazzling embellishment to his record."

"This one didn't break any windows open… he left the window open."

"He becomes only more impressive."

"There's something you should know, though. A gun was found not too far from where the girl was picked up–we think it's hers. And there's two rounds missing…"

"I'll see it when I get there."

No, no, he couldn’t think of it that way. It was plausible she hadn’t loaded the whole thing–after all, the other one you’d shot had been incredibly incompetent. And if he began to think that you’d been shot, or shot *twice*, he’d lose focus… he’d start to believe that you were running on limited time, yes, he’d get so mangled and blurry that he’d make a fatal mistake that he couldn’t afford. So he distanced himself as best he could and *thought*. You were alive, yes, for now–that could relax him. You were well enough to go run off after your abductors. You knew where you were going better than he did… *Pleasant Ends, Pleasant Ends.* It didn’t take him long to look up on his phone. It seemed legitimate but for a few reasons–namely, that it didn’t seem to have any employees or even ways to contact the establishment. It hardly seemed to exist… but it did have an address, close enough for you to run to it despite being shot and jogging-phobic, although *walk-ins are discouraged and will be turned away.* Not today, it seemed…

He returned to the original crime scene, which now included an extraordinarily sheepish Adam Coveney. When Coveney spotted him, he immediately began apologizing with no prompting necessary.

“You’d be surprised–she was a feisty girl. Really annoyed and cold by the whole ordeal–she didn’t even get treated and she jumped out a window–could you believe it, though? Bleeding and shot and everything…”

“Actually,” John broke in, “*his* fiancée is also bleeding and shot, and–correct me if I’m wrong–she’s in trouble and you failed. More or less.”

“More or less.” Coveney, cognizant of his failure and desperate to redeem himself, wracked his brain for any sort of useful tidbit. “I *did* get a good look at her, though! Um, didn’t get her name. Wouldn’t tell me. Wouldn’t tell me *anything.* Peculiar. Had a sort of widow-y look about her. Very tragic. Oh, and she smelled a lot like ash.”

“Ash?” Ah, Christ, the message for you–a *preference for cremation.* “What kind of ash, precisely?”

“You have to believe me, see–my stepdad, he works as a firefighter. When I was a kid, he took me out on a work day. A flat was burned to the ground, everybody inside gone–various states of burn, you see? Burning human flesh smells just awful, but human *ash*, it actually smells really sweet. Like a barbeque or cookhouse. But that doesn’t sound right, does it? Where would she get *human* ash? So I thought she worked in a restaurant…”

“Yes, yes,” Sherlock broke in impatiently. “I can tell you’ve strained your mental capacities for the day, Coveney, but *do* try to quit while you’re somewhat ahead.”

So the girl and the abductor were trying to take you to the crematory, a place where you’d gone of your own accord. And it was not hard to figure out just what they’d do with you once you were in there–there were only so many things to do in such a place–

Stanley was going to burn you alive.

Stanley, formidable enough to make *you* tremble. Stanley, who was waiting for you. Stanley, whom you could surprise by arriving early and accompanied, but who was also healthy and able while you were injured and bleeding and probably exhausted.

He was already heading in the direction of Pleasant Ends, but now he quickened his pace. The thought of you trapped somewhere, pounding bleeding fists on a coffin lid that would never open. You, roasting alive, crying for help, crying for *him*, and he was so far behind you–

He could have hailed a cab, yes, but he was hardly thinking of it. Stanley, that bastard, had placed him in a position where his emotions and blinding fear were in battle with his usual calm and complacent logic, and currently the former was winning out against his will. No one had seen him leave, and he was alone, as you had been–now running, as you had done–heading to where you were fighting your demon alone and disadvantaged.

Sherlock was running faster now, faster until he was panting and the buildings were racing past him–he could feel your footsteps underneath his. He wondered if he wasn’t doing enough. He had to run there, and quickly, because you were at the end.

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## Chapter 31: Vissi d'arte

**Author's Notes:** I love Stanley the best ugh he's my bab i had to use the torture method from the second sherlock holmes movie don'T JUDGE ME I LIKED IT

and in a tumblr audio post i mused on how much i hate really pretentious or pompous reviewers
and i realized i have some of the best readers and reviewers
you all are so thoughtful and nice and SMART ugh you're the best

in other news, the stanley arc reaches its climax/end next chapter, which should be up on tuesday because i have to be at school for like ten hours with absolutely nothing to do but watch tv shows and catch up for nano

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It didn't take him as long as he thought to get to Pleasant Ends, although that was probably because he had temporarily lost all sense of time and distance. Like a man who'd been struck in the head, he was dizzy and disoriented, only able to see what was right in front of him. It was disconcerting to realize you'd been in this place before, and although even though *you* had no idea what to expect or anticipate, your step had been twice as sure as his...

Honestly, he didn't know what he expected when he finally reached Pleasant Ends. It was no different than any other funeral home he'd been to–quiet, solemn to the point of being stern, and incredibly artificial. Unused, too... the sofas, armchairs, and books all looked as if they'd never been opened (although he’d question why anyone would read Nietzsche at a funeral, anyway). It was prim, proper, and so deathly silent that he wondered if you were actually there.

Sherlock did not find any of Stanley’s acquaintances in the funeral home–he didn’t find anyone at all, and that was why he was nearing panic. There was no way that you’d go down without a riot, and if it was already silent, well, then…

The stern silence of the funeral home did little to help him. It should have been a welcome relief: silence so that he could finally think. But now his mind was turning on itself, and now he was envisioning every possible way that Stanley could have ~~killed~~ ~~tortured~~ dealt with you…

The ornate carpet beneath his feet seemed off for a moment, and he stopped abruptly to find bloodstains on it. Look back at his tracks, he found light spotting from a few feet back… evidence of a bleeding individual running the same way. By the looks of it, you weren’t bleeding too heavily, and judging by the distance between bloodstains, you were healthy enough to run. So it couldn’t be too bad just yet…

Pleasant Ends was of moderate size, fit to accommodate quite a few funerals at a time. But he found no business in any rooms he crossed into–there wasn’t much evidence that anyone even *used* them. Whoever owned the place didn’t even bother to stock tissues… every other funeral home he’d been in, he couldn’t walk five feet without running into one, not that he ever needed them. And even though he willed himself to find you around every corner he turned, you were nowhere to be found.

Sherlock had nearly reached the end of Pleasant End itself when your blood trail stopped entirely. His breath shortened in panic, and he looked up to find where you’d run off to, and–it was outside the door of an office, the office of *Funeral Director S. Stanley.*

He needed only to look at that name to hate it immensely. The man who had caused all of your suffering was the fucking *director* of the whole establishment. You had already promised that you’d kill him no matter what. And he believed you more than capable of fulfilling such a threat, except he couldn’t see the blood trail going out the other way–

So for once, Sherlock took a page from your book–he pulled a gun before he’d even entered the room, and he slammed the door open. Such a dramatic gesture seemed a prerequisite to something eventful and climactic, but he didn’t exactly find danger on the other side… instead, he found that the inside was as proper and solemn as the rest of Pleasant Ends, but for one difference–someone was there, and although he was not *you*, he was still important enough to arrest Sherlock’s attention.

“Ah, hello,” Stanley greeted, looking up distractedly from some paperwork and not quite reacting to the fact that he had a gun pointed at him. “Were you here for an appointment? I’m sorry, but we’re closed.”

Once more, Sherlock wasn’t sure what he expected when he looked at Stanley. The man in front of him did not look dangerous in the least… but he didn’t quite look innocent and tremulous, either. He looked like the man who could easily disappear into a crowd… and that was probably one of his talents. He had a patient gaze and a responsible demeanor, neatly dressed and groomed. He looked like the kind of man that a girl could take home to meet her parents, although that didn’t seem to have worked out for his late wife.

“Who are you, anyway?” Stanley asked, his tone even and polite. “I don’t understand why you’re pointing a gun at me. I haven’t done anything to you, have I?”

Sherlock was growing impatient, almost because of Stanley’s comparative calm. “Where is she?”

“Whom?”

“The lady who was here. The one you tried to abduct.”

“Oh! Her, yes. The lady, or as *he* calls her, *the she-devil.*” Stanley sighed and adjusted his glasses. “She was quite a troublemaker–she came down the halls like a demon and frightened off all of my workers… as you can tell, it’s quite empty here. And then she came to me and wouldn’t behave very much–she was always quite pushy, and that was a problem.”

Sherlock’s head was pounding at Stanley’s choice of words. “*Was*?”

“Va, va, *is*, I suppose. Some people don’t change despite their various states of decay.” Stanley was twisting his ring–worn on his right hand, evidence of his time spent in Germany. “You asked me where she is. I tell you that it won’t do much good to keep threatening me with a gun. What, are you police?”

“I'm afraid not.”

“What! No?” He raised a brow and pushed up his glasses again. “I thought that there wasn’t enough of a fuss! Then you can only be one person–you must be the *fee-on-say.*”

“You’re correct,” Sherlock said tightly. “*Where* is she?”

“And I tell you, that depends. *C’est la vie en rose.* Don’t tell me–you’d like to know why I had to take her, isn’t that right?”

“It’s because she knows that you killed your wife. Isn’t that right?”

Just a moment prior, Stanley had been calm and complacent at his desk–and in another instant, he turned into a demon, fiery-eyed and snarling. The change was instantaneous and jarring, but just a brief glimpse at the nature of this Stanley.

“I did *not* kill her!” he fumed, spitting blood. “You hear me? It was her fault… she shouldn’t have listened to me over the phone. Why did she have to–? And she thought I was having an affair! She heard his voice and she thought he was my lover… that was her own fault… and when she told me what she thought, of course *he’d* tell me to push her out the window… so I didn’t kill her, *he* did, I still love her very much, yes…”

Stanley took a deep breath and sighed, regaining himself. “These things must happen, you understand. Why, I was surprised that you arrived. I only know you by names–a mister *Sherlock Holmes.* She didn’t call for you, if it pleases you… but when I mentioned you, she began to misbehave. Why…” He pulled something out from beneath the desk–your SIG Sauer, your most prized possession. “Well, when she went up on the hook, I got it from her, but once I mentioned you, she ripped yourself off of it and stabbed me with a pen. And it did hurt–for obvious reasons. He was right in calling her a she-devil…”

“Hooks,” was all Sherlock could reply. “Hooks.”

“It was my fault for not showing you,” Stanley explained apologetically. “Because of her–wisdom taken from sages and revealed unto babes, and the like–it came to notice that I’d have to move to a new location–bodies must be disposed of. We get some honest business, a few times, but it’s very easy to burn bodies this way. Wouldn’t you agree? And when there’s just too many, they need to be hung up. But she wouldn’t behave, and…”

Stanley coughed and stood, and only then did Sherlock notice Stanley’s affliction. He’d been shot in the stomach, apparently more than once, not counting you ripping it open with his own pen, and his wound was indeed fatal… it was a wonder that his guts weren’t falling all over the place. When he pushed up his sleeves he showed how his arms were also cut up–probably a result of you grabbing hold of an letter opener on his desk. But Stanley hardly seemed bothered, and was even nonchalant as he beckoned Sherlock to follow him into a room that led away from his office.

It was a room filled with hooks–meat hooks, like at a butcher’s. Old blood was staining most of them, evidence of those hung up to wait, mostly dead and perhaps some still living–like you.

“She wouldn’t behave, as I’d said… and even though she shot me, the bitch, she was shot herself and I could still drag her over… my, she hung up there for a while! Suspended no more than three feet off the ground, I assure you, not too bad. Right through the shoulder, and she twisted around, she couldn’t keep still… and I thought it would be nice to entertain her… I did enjoy *Tosca.*”

So he’d stabbed you and then hung you from the ceiling–and Sherlock was very close to killing him and tearing the place apart himself to look for you. “*Where* is she?”

“He who fights monsters should see to it that he himself does not become a monster, and he who asks awful questions should see to it that he himself does not become the answer to one. But won’t you be patient? Why, I sang ‘Vissi d’arte’ to her. I think it would fit her–going on with her justice and loyalty, protecting those little people, and she’s hung up–‘*why, why Lord, why do you repay me thus?*’” He smiled a conspiratorial smile. “I don’t think she enjoyed it too much. Do you think I ruined it for her?”

“But you didn’t kill her,” Sherlock reasoned. “You don’t bother with torture before killing. It’s too lengthy for you–you make space for the dead and their removal, but not for means of killing them first. Who do you work for?”

"What, Mister Holmes!" Stanley looked genuinely surprised, and coughed up another round of blood. "I've been told that you're very deductive and reasonable. Don't be alarmed, you know what they say–*you can trust flatterers.* But you should relax, I wouldn't want you to get panicky on me. My employer didn't even assume that you would know her… so he thought he was killing two birds with one bullet. Make you twitch and make her go away. I didn't ask for it, he planned it. Oh, yes–I don't think he'd be upset if I told you. Moriarty, yes, Moriarty…"

The name was a bucket of cold water to the face–the name was a kick to the stomach. Moriarty, the *bastard* Moriarty! Did he have to be behind everything? Couldn't there just be one damned thing that didn't end with that name?

"Of course, things did not go so well… she was a she-devil, as advertised. The effect was lost, as you can see… she didn't cry for you, although she might have thought about it. And I didn't even have enough time to bait you over… you came on your own. But it won't matter too much, I suppose… even if your fiancée is dead, things will not change. Just look how far I've gotten already! Why… you must know that American story about the man who kills the woman on the subway, and the whole day, no one notices him."

"I'm afraid," Sherlock muttered through gritted teeth, "that's not how the story goes. You misjudged everything and you certainly won't live from your injuries. Just what do you plan on doing now?"

"I'm sure you've figured that out already." Stanley shrugged a little. "She'll die, and I'll die, and then what? It will be equivalent… you'll neither win nor lose." And he leaned forward a little, blood pooling around his feet although he didn't notice–he fixed an interested gaze on Sherlock. "But does it bother you, Mister Holmes? That she was in pain, calling, needing help and screaming, oh, it *echoed*, and you weren't there? Doesn't that bother you at all? You wouldn't have run out all this way, alone, if you didn't love her, and if you love her then you know that she was in pain and you weren't there to help her at all. Do you feel terrible about it? It's reasonable to ask."

No, no–Sherlock could tell what he was trying to do. Trying to make his emotions overtake his logic, and although that was happening slowly, he couldn't let himself panic… he couldn't lose himself in those thoughts. Stanley was trying to distract him–and for what? You must be in some sort of danger that he was trying to hide. Sherlock had to pressure him, he had to press him somehow… And he recalled what you said about him… something about his name…

"Stanley," he said. "Stanley–Stanley *what, what* Stanley?"

Stanley's mouth twitched a bit. "W-what?"

"S. Stanley. Dear God! Don't tell me your name is *Stanley Stanley* or some Humbert Humbert nonsense like that."

Just as when Sherlock had mentioned his wife, Stanley lost himself in frenzy. He flew into a rage, ripping at the meat hooks and making for Sherlock as if to attack him. "*Stanford Stanley*! My name is *not* Stanley *Stanley!*"

Sherlock recalled that it was your job to be trigger-happy, but he didn't see why he couldn't resemble you for a moment. Without much hesitation he shot Stanley in the leg, and the latter responded with something less than enthusiasm.

"Tell me where she is!" Sherlock demanded, gritting his teeth as if to break them. "I don't have time for you anymore. You're going to die and you'll be useless to me then… tell me what you did with her."

"Ah, you haven't worked here; you haven't gotten a smell for it yet!" Stanley growled, severely less wordy when bleeding on the ground. "Human ash smells so poetic, doesn't it? I'm sure she smells better than the others–feisty ones like her always do. She must be ready for consumption, if I were a cannibal. She's in the furnace, a warm golden-brown, maybe…"

Fire ran up Sherlock's spine at the thought of it–so he'd put you in the furnace–didn't he? And you were burning, you were dying–and he dropped Stanley entirely and turned to race to the back of the funeral home, the only place he hadn't been and the only place where you could possibly be. If you had gotten here recently, how gone could you be? How far gone were you?

As much as he had endeavored to treat this as any other case, placing logic over emotion as he'd always done, he found it impossible to stay calm… yes, his heart was racing, and he knew very well why… something was paralyzing his heart and he knew that it was pure terror.

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## Chapter 32: E Izaghi e Izanami

**Author's Notes:** well SORRY i didn't want to split this up into two chapters
also i wanted to write all about this chapter in here but i don't have enough space so i hope you all figure it out for yourselves and stuff but honestly i think everyone gets lots of space here except for me I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT

also in psych we were learning about language development and everything and i was half-asleep because it was all review for me and i had the fleeting image of sherlock having twins and their first word is "John" and so they crawl around all day going "Jawn! Jawn! Jawn!" and i don't even know i was really tired and so we get some filler and then it's irene's arc!
i hope you enjoy the good feeling now

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From elsewhere in Pleasant Ends, Stanford Stanley was laughing–Sherlock could hear it echo from where he was running. It wasn't a hectic laugh, not one that betrayed any insanity or psychopathy, but merely a polite chuckle… like a man laughing at his own private joke. Although, this joke happened to involve you burning alive in a cremator...

He pushed himself through door after door as the more industrial part of Pleasant Ends detached itself from the rest of the funeral home. The sickeningly sweet smell of human ash was growing stronger and stronger, and Sherlock understood himself to be close to the cremation chambers. They were not very hard to find–the large silver chambers were a stark contrast from the attempted traditionalism of the funeral home. There was not just one cremator, but three, and even the ones not in use had been preheated–had Stanley anticipated a few more disposals being done besides that of a wayward lady? And for that matter–just which one had he shoved you in?

On the side of the cremation chambers were windows–windows intended for the bereaved to watch the process for closure. At any other time, he would have been fascinated and might have sat down to observe, but this was a bit of a wrong fucking time for that. He examined each of the sides in a hurry, looking for any signs of life, although at this point, he wasn't quite sure that even an immortal like you would be able to survive this. So he hoped to find nothing…

…except there was a body, in the very last one.

Charred and blackened and close to wasting away into nothing. So far gone there was nothing left to look at. Nothing of you remained anymore–not your face, or hair, or even your skin, by the looks of it. You were gone and he'd lost you. Complete obliteration–

No, wait, no. That blow to the soul was completely uncalled for and he needed to control it. He couldn't let the ground twist underneath his feet like that… he couldn't let his palms get slick with sweat and he couldn't cut his breathing. His heart was going like a jackrabbit on steroids and he had to *stop it* already. He had to *think* about what he was observing. This was something meant to induce a knee-jerk reaction, which Stanford Stanley was a professional at… and Sherlock knew that he'd been doing it since he arrived. This was no different, yes… he had to *think* about what was right in front of him.

This body–he couldn't yet label it as *your* body–was already nearly a skeleton. The cremation process took nearly three hours to complete… and Stanley would not be able to sustain the wounds you'd given him for such a long time. And Sherlock guessed that you'd gotten to Pleasant Ends less than an hour ago, so the time didn't match up… and *look down, look down.* You'd been shot and stuck on a meat hook, and you'd wasted Stanley… if he had dragged you there by the hair, there's no way that the ground would look so clean. Yes–not a single bit of blood. You hadn't been there and neither had Stanley, unless Stanley had found it prudent to wash the whole area while bleeding to death…

An overwhelming wave of *relief* passed over him, right before it was replaced by a new wave of concern. Just because you hadn't been burned didn't meant that you were still alive. At the very least, you were in trouble. You were injured and probably bleeding heavily, and although he didn't know the extent of your injuries, he assumed that if he didn't find you soon, you might expire.

He retreated from the chambers and retraced his steps down the hallway, uncertainty and dread in every step. This was the end of Pleasant Ends and he still hadn't found you yet, so where could you be? The place was too big for him to check everywhere and retain timeliness. If you had passed out, then there might be no way to find you… and maybe you were silent with the fear that Stanley was going to come after you. He was determined to not slow himself down with such details, and he found it practical to not calculate your chances of survival at any given moment…

Sherlock, growing impatient, began a reasonable algorithm–he slammed open the doors for every room he passed. Looking back, he was unsure of his requirements for counting a room out, but he did think himself sure of certain places–places that were too small, nowhere to hide, open coffins, and the like… And with every door he shut again, he was filled with greater desperation than before. To go down the halls calling your name like a madman would be imprudent, considering Stanley was under the impression that he thought you dead, and he would rather Stanley not join in on the search. But with every failure to find you, he felt more and more compelled to go to Stanley and drag him around until he found you.

Besides Stanley's office, there were only three other rooms that you could possibly be in. If he still couldn't find you, then he could only assume that you'd vanished from the face of the world entirely, which would be mildly irritating. One of the rooms was substantially bigger than the others, and for just a moment he went inside, looking to observer the layout of the entire room before he disregarded it. It was a room for larger wakes, by the looks of it, lots of chairs and an ornate display coffin, lots of bookcases stuffed with useless encyclopedias… still nowhere where you could be, as far as he could see.

His body jerked around as he looked, willing you to appear in front of him. You would have certainly lost a lot of blood by now, and your shoulder was in trouble. Sherlock Holmes was not a man who failed in many things, and if he failed in this, then he would not be able to forgive himself–and it was a rare day when he could not excuse himself for any minor inconsistency in his skills, and it was an even rarer day when he admitted to it. But this was not a day when he could allow that to happen…

It was a pure act of God that compelled him to get something off of his chest–really, he had no idea what compelled him to open his mouth and call out your name. It was an irrational and rather stupid thing to do, considering he had no reason to believe that you would hear him, or that you were even nearby. But it was not impossible to say that he only wanted to say it after nearly twenty minutes of a frenzied search for you. He would not be able to explain just why he did it, but he did–he called out your name, his voice low and hoarse, not in inquiry but in what he felt was an embarrassingly desperate request.

And–like someone worthy of being prayed to, you replied, "Sherlock?"

He didn't believe it when he heard it–he had no reason to believe it. At first he thought he was hallucinating, which was reasonable at a time like this, and he assumed that he was merely imagining your voice because he wanted to hear it. But then why did you sound so muffled–?

Again: "Sherlock…?"

He found himself unable to reply as the coffin on the other side of the room slowly raised its lid, seemingly on its own accord. But, no! There you were, rising out of it like an irritated vampire, rubbing your eyes against the bright light of the room. You looked down right surprised to see him, but you smiled, probably because you were the first likeable face you'd seen all day. And did he mention that you were *alive*? Because even at first he couldn't believe it up until the point when you swung your legs out of the coffin to get out of it and nearly knocked it over when you stood, right before you swore and tried to stop it from falling so it wouldn't break.

"Wow!" you exclaimed. "Coffins are too heavy."

And *that's* when he was certain it was you, although he didn't move just yet–he was still stricken, after all. He was frozen in place as he saw you–and you were more like an angel of death or tired war goddess than anything. A dagger-like letter opener clutched in your hand, your clothes ragged and torn, your hair messed, bleeding from a heavy wound on your shoulder as you smiled slightly and called out, ethereally, "*Sher-lock…*"

He had no god to thank, so he didn't. He still hadn't moved, and it was you who approached him, looking at him with a bit of confusion.

"What's the matter, Sherlock?" you asked, concerned, despite the fact that it was you who clutching at her bleeding, ripped shoulder. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

All he could say was, "Stanley is still alive."

"*Still*? Wow! Jesus Christ." You sighed. "I think he might be an immortal. One of those, you know…? I didn't just shoot him, I unloaded into him… I ran out of bullets and he didn't even fall down… but you must have heard about that. He took my gun, you know? I hope you got it back. Didn't you? It's like *wow*, you know? This shoulder can't catch a break at all… it's the same one from that woman in Sicily. Do you remember her?"

And if he needed a solid argument to deduce your current deliriousness: "You know, this letter opener is really nice. I think I'll keep it around."

It was his intent to say something along the lines of, "Oh, darling, I was worried, I love you so–" but he supposed the meaning stayed the same when he said, "You're going to die unless I get you to hospital."

"Wow, you think I don't know that?" You glared up at him, impatient. "I told you already, I don't really care. Stanley's still alive and I have to get to him. I have a reason now, don't I…? He tried to kill me. Tried to drag me off by the hair to the cremator… didn't count on me being able to get off a hook by myself and stab him… so I ran. How'd you get here, anyway? I don't remember telling you where I was going… I haven't seen you in a while, actually…"

You were pale, near collapse, and in desperate need of having your shoulder fixed. He stooped low to kiss you, if only to get you to stop talking so you could breathe properly when it was over. That, and he needed the reminder that you were alive, for the time being… and such a kiss was full of shame and *guilt*, guilt for not understanding soon enough, not getting there quicker, not finding you in time–guilt he could never verbalize, shame he could never reveal to you but would nevertheless plague him for far too long.

And immediately you sensed it–probably because you were still stuck in a haze, and in a moment like that, everything could be revealed to you. And you kissed him deeper, more insistently, right before pulling away and touching the sides of his face.

"I think I should have known that you'd find me," you said, a smile spreading on your face. "You were always the best, Sherlock… John says you're fantastic, but–I think you're the *most* amazing, *most* fantastic… thank you." You were silent for a moment as he took it in, before saying, "But you have to promise me something."

"You're not quite in a state for that."

"No, it's not too bad." Immediately you became serious. "You have to kill Stanley. Or do *something*. You know it's not over, right?"

"The man seems to have made a living on covering up his tracks. I suspect today will be no different."

"Exactly… he won't stop until someone else makes him." You paused. "Just what will he do, anyway? I can't think of much a man loaded with bullets could do…" And then, panic. "Oh, my God! He has a pacemaker, Sherlock. You hear about those things exploding when put in a cremator. He's going to burn himself alive to blow up the place!"

"I have several reasons why I believe that's not the case, but in your given condition I think you'll die by the time I list them all."

"Suit yourself."

"Listen," he said, gripping you by the shoulders, "wait here. I'll be back in a moment."

"What! No way."

"I refuse to get in an argument because you think it necessary that you and only *you* be the one to kill him. But the current situation would indicate–"

"Not *that*, idiot," you snapped, relishing this brief period where you could call him that and get away with it. "I mean about *you*. You're healthy and not injured and you're still in no condition to face him! I don't *want* you to go."

For anyone else, it would be hard to argue with a puppy-dog-eyed fiancée who happened to be grievously injured, to add to the drama. But Sherlock glared at you and shook you a bit.

"I'll be fine. *You* won't be. Won't you be a good girl for once? It's a lot less troublesome for me."

"Sherlock!" You gripped his sleeve tightly. "I mean it. He's dangerous and it'd be fine if I went in there myself, but now it's you. Please don't leave me."

The double meaning behind it was a slap to the face. That was what it was, then…? After all this, you were only after his well-being. You had ripped yourself out of torture to attack Stanley only because he'd mentioned his name… and you'd revealed yourself only because you'd heard him call for you. And you might not even know yet that it was his fault that you'd been abducted in the first place, albeit you had singlehandedly brought that plot to failure. And it frustrated him to his core that, in the end, you were fine dying if it meant he could leave.

"For once," he said, gritting his teeth, "I'm going to call you an idiot. You *are* an idiot. Emotional and impulsive and you've hardly thought anything through. Bleeding to death and still rife with sentiment. Selfless to the point of *martyrdom*. You do realize how tiresome that is?" He shook you just a little harder. "I told you to be selfish. Don't be an idiot. Haven't you thought about what *I* could do if *you* died? You're probably still on the impression that I won't notice when you're gone. Did you think I sprinted the whole way here to listen to you deliriously list out pointless reasons why you feel I can't do anything for you?"

And you: "You *sprinted* the whole way here? Wow." You glanced at the ceiling briefly. "I think if you're in trouble, I might not sprint. I'll make a light jog…"

"You'll fall over soon," he decided, hoping that you did so that you'd forget everything he just told you. "Go sit down and try not to discover trouble while I'm gone."

"But, Sherlock!"

Something struck him, and he decided to utilize it: "Autumn."

You were confused. "Autumn *what*?"

"I'm not one for planning, but I think it to be a lovely time for a wedding. Don't you?"

"A wed…" You trailed off, eyes widening as you realized what he meant. "You…"

"Good, darling. Mull that over for a few minutes."

And he left you abruptly, only because he meant to return, and he saw no reason why he wouldn't be able to. You were in no condition to chase after him or anything, so he assumed that you had nothing to do but sit and wait for him–and it probably annoyed you greatly, since you seemed antsy doing anything *but* getting yourself into trouble.

Stanley was still in his office, probably mulling over how many other places he could get shot without dying. (Anything short of the brain, it seemed) When he saw Sherlock, he gave a brief smile, like seeing a friend who had just momentarily left the room.

"So you didn't find her where you expected, then?" Stanley asked, innocently. "About lying to you… well, I suppose that I like to do things like that. I don't actually know what happened to her… but I don't think she's dead. Do you? We are cut from the same chunk of cheese, so to speak… gladiators in another life. But why are you still pointing a gun at me?"

"Because you've lived too long," he said, suddenly feeling that he was in a televised drama.

"What, are you sore about this whole ordeal?" Stanley sighed. "What? Did she ask you to kill me, if anything happened to her?"

Sherlock smirked faintly. "I could consider it a wedding present."

"And good on you. But I'm near the bottom, as you might have guessed… no real importance, in the scheme of things. And you know that Moriarty has men, lots of men–women, too, he has a girl who's one of his favorite pets. They won't simply *stop*."

And Sherlock was honest: "You're annoying me."

"I suppose I am. Well, there's no point in eliciting a reaction from you now, I suppose… although the panic was nice to see that first couple of times." Stanley smiled a bit. "It's as it goes. *Do you hear the people scream*? Of course, we all know we're going to die. I've already broken the cremators, and you'll smell smoke soon–the place will burn down, as so many disappointing failures have. But I'd like to see you try to bring that about for me."

"You're only a man."

"As are *you*, despite the fact that you'd love to think otherwise. You're a mortal, through and through no matter how many times you'd love to paint yourself as such a perfect machine. But you've become attached to a person (more than one, definitely) and that's a flaw we all seem to be facing at the moment."

Stanley was pondering something that Sherlock couldn't guess, as if he were thinking about someone on his side that was facing such an affliction. And Sherlock only said, "I'm sure you're speaking from experience, given your murder of your wife."

He, of course, had said the magic words… he had pushed one of Stanley's buttons, pressed the most dangerous parts of his brain. The change was as instantaneous and unsettling as it had been before, and Sherlock had thought he'd anticipated it–but not *this*.

Stanley had become a beast of lore–something that had might have only existed in the dreams of a child. By now he was covered in blood almost from head to toe, *his* blood and some of yours, and when he coughed or spoke it came from his mouth–blood stained his gnashing teeth red, and he was the picture of the vicious, hulking demon in human form, eyes a portrait of hatred and gaze a promise of destruction. And yet, Sherlock had recalled how unremarkable Stanley had been when he'd first walked in to see the latter at his desk. A man who loved his wife, whom the police loved, whom everyone except you adored and trusted. At one point in time, he might have been such an inconsequential creature, and this change had not happened on its own.

*Moriarty!* Stanford Stanley was no longer a man, he was a mechanism, a living machine working solely for the world's only consulting criminal. Moriarty did not like getting his own hands dirty, so he sent someone–some*thing*–like Stanley to do his bidding. Sherlock had seen Moriarty's men before, but none like this! None so violent, so acquainted with chaos, who hid behind a sheeplike face. And Stanley was not even the worst of them, by his own words!

Sherlock could not think of one thing that Stanley could actually do to him, but the man's approach was one of such threat that even he took pause for a moment, just a moment–but the demon in front of him stopped dead in his tracks. Shock and something close to horror crawled into his face, and Sherlock immediately knew who had appeared behind him. You had probably made your way over to them step by step, slowly, leaning against the wall for support–and you hadn't stopped. So he couldn't keep you still for too long…

"You bitch," Stanley cried, although all of the demons had gone out of his voice for a moment–it was no longer the twisted, low rage of before, but close to trembling. He had lost his eloquence, his easy and condescending way of speaking. "You bitch, you *shot* me! Did you hear me? I'm going to fucking *kill you*, I'm going to gut you like a fucking pig."

"Stanford Stanley," Sherlock heard you say behind him–you sounded amused. "We were born to kill each other. At least, both of us can't live. Everybody has one and you're mine."

And then you said, "Sherlock…" He felt your hand press to his back, light and mild, almost soothing, but firm. It drifted up his back, over to his shoulder blades, before drifting down and across his outstretched arm. You were as gentle as when you were making love, although Sherlock knew he had that impression because he couldn't see your expression. You leaned forward a little to extend your reach, and within a moment your hand was there, your finger over his on the trigger.

"You had to, didn't you?" he accused.

"I *told* you…" And then, before finishing the sentence–although you'd never planned on finishing it from the beginning–you pressed on his finger and shot Stanley, right in the chest this time. This time he could not keep going as he was before. He was on the ground, screeching and swearing, cursing you and Sherlock and Moriarty and everyone. Mostly he was unintelligible, but you didn't have much time to make out what he was saying… before he could be stopped, he half-scrambled, half-slithered out of the office on his belly, making a slick trail of blood as he went.

You went to go after him to finish him off, to ensure that he was dead, but you could barely make it–you had to lean on Stanley's desk for support. ("Wow, Sherlock! Thank God I got my gun back. *You* were no help.") Sherlock picked you up and sat you down on it, intending to wait for someone else to arrive (hadn't the police figured it out *yet*?), but after a moment he could smell the smoke wafting it. Stanley hadn't been bluffing about the cremators–he had made them malfunction, and Pleasant Ends would meet its own namesake.

He leaned down so that you were eye-level with him, and immediately you burst into apologies. "Look, I'm sorry, but I couldn't let you do it by yourself. I'm sorry it took me so long. I'm really sorry you even had to think about it, and I'm sorry I made you *come here* in the first place–"

"If you apologize once more, I'll never take you to the opera." His voice lowered and quickened with urgency. "Listen, sweetheart, don't get panicked, but it's not over yet. He's started a fire, and judging by the structure of the building, it's going to spread quickly."

You were utterly confused, not by the mention of the fire, but by the fact that Sherlock was being concerned. "Back that up a minute. What did you call me? I mean–yes, let's get going."

"Put your arms around my neck."

"*What*?" Now you bristled with shock and bemusement. You were almost angry that he was being so uncharacteristically tender to you and you became suspicious that your condition was so bad that it forced him to act this way. "Do I look like I've been stabbed in the *legs* or something? I can walk perfectly fine on my own, thank you."

"Yes, I know, but I don't want you to be so slow that you kill us both."

And with a smile and a delighted cry of "*My Sherlock!*" you lifted your arms up and hugged him around the neck. He scooped you up with ease, not because he had ever practiced for it, but because it was just one of those days and these things had to happen. Adrenaline made you light in his arms, and your blood loss made you light in the head.

"Why don't you carry me more often?" you demanded, not visibly concerned by the fact that the building would soon burn down over your head.

"Believe me, this will be the last time."

"You still have to carry me across the threshold, you know."

"I think I'll find it more prudent to put you in a wagon and roll you over it."

"I'm tired. Can the glad-we're-alive sex wait? I think I'll be able to sleep for a whole day. If I start now I'll avoid questioning…"

And he barked, "No!"

“Give me a break. The last time I was stabbed this bad, *you* let me sleep for ten hours and I was completely fine.” You glared up at him, although it was hard to leave affection out of it. “I’m legitimately tired and I think I’ve deserved at least one day off of work. And I’d really want to sleep next to you tonight, but I think they’ll keep me in hospital.”

It was his turn to glare. “You’re not going to deny a hospital this time.”

“Wow! That was only twice.”

“*Three* times.”

“I rounded down. Oh, hey–do you hear something?”

Indeed he did–police sirens outside. That fact alone whisked him out of Pleasant Ends quicker than the fact that it was about to burn down… he couldn’t pass up this opportunity.

“Afternoon, Lestrade,” he greeted, not letting you down just yet. “Impeccable timing as always.”

“If *someone* hadn’t run off without informing *anyone* of his intentions…”

“How’d you find this place, anyway?” you piped up, genuinely interested.

“Dr. Watson mentioned something about your mother dying… I thought that it couldn’t be right, since I already gave you days off so you could go to her funeral a few years ago. I looked up the funeral director of that place, and it was the same guy who bothered you all those years ago.”

You looked pointedly at your bleeding shoulder. “I think *bothered* is a rather bowdlerized version of the affairs.”

“I guess we know that *now*.”

“Where is he?” You went into a sudden panic and squirmed in Sherlock’s hold. “Stanley. He ran out here. Where’d he go?”

Lestrade was bemused. “There’s no one here. We’ve been here five minutes, no one’s come out. A disappearing girl and a disappearing Stanley. It looks like no one in this case has the decency to stick around. You went in there like a bull, didn't you? A pretty risky engagement.”

You were immediately confused, for a moment thinking that he was referring to you and Sherlock. So you opened your mouth, offended, before realizing what Lestrade had meant, and you said "Oh–" and couldn't think of a response, so you were glad for the next change of subject.

“The girl!” Coveney exclaimed, recalling his failure. “What happened with her?”

“Oh, her?” You shrugged. “Not much, I guess… she tried to shoot me, but I didn’t have *time* for it, so I sort of just backhanded her wrist and she ended up nicking my arm… I barely even bled. I don’t think she expected me to draw so fast, but I don’t even remember her… I was running.”

Still thinking about Stanley, you continued to wriggle. “But–it was only a second ago–that’s not right.” You looked over Sherlock’s shoulder, expecting to see him there. “I mean, he was *there*.”

“He wouldn’t have gotten very far, considering you shot him God knows how many times,” Sherlock reminded you. “He probably never left the building.”

“Shh! I don’t want to get in trouble.”

And it did bother you that Stanford Stanley could still be alive, but you didn’t put too much stock into it. It was true–there wasn’t much he could do while sustaining such heavy injuries. Even immortals had limits, right? Not everybody lived at the end of the opera. And for right now, you were all right…

“We do have to ask you some questions about the abduction, or lack thereof,” Lestrade said. “Then you need to get to the goddamn *hospital*.”

“You might want to switch that around,” Sherlock advised.

"Just what did *you* do in there, by the way?"

“Um,” you broke in, “Sherlock didn’t have to do with anything, by the way. Totally inconsequential… Stanley didn’t even see him. But he did save me, though. Isn’t that right? Darling?”

You pulled him down for a kiss that was 1) so sudden that he nearly dropped you and 2) so passionate that Donovan immediately made a face that would last the next three minutes. It worked perfectly to get Sherlock out of trouble, so when you broke apart, Lestrade could only sheepishly say, “Pass ‘er over to Coveney and we’ll get her patched up.”

Sherlock was incredibly reluctant to give you over to the eager Coveney, and as soon as you were in his arms, you barked that you wanted to *stand* already, you were *fine*. They put a shock blanket on you (“I’m *fine*!”) and prepared to lead you away, but you were reluctant to leave Sherlock’s side.

“It’s all right,” he told you. “You’re fine now. Now I can tell you that you’re safe without lying…”

“Will you visit me while I'm in hospital?”

“Probably not,” he admitted. “Crying and whimpering… not my scene. So do hurry back. I’ll be there waiting for you.”

And you cried *of course!* as they led you away for questioning and treatment, although now and again you kept looking over your shoulder to make sure that he was still there. And Sherlock remained there each time he looked, through John telling him that you should be *dead* by now, through Donovan asking why everything burned down while you were involved, through everything–

Each time you turned you worried that he’d disappear in that brief instance, but–no, he was there, constant, tangible, and waiting patiently for you because he wanted to… and for a moment you could tell yourself that he’d be there, always… Until then you’d have patching up to do, maybe stitches, you didn’t know, and when you’d get back he’d be sitting in his chair and you’d get into a discussion. If you were a good girl you might get out after a few days, and at quarter to four you might be able…

Oh–! You had forgotten, and you looked over your shoulder one last time... and he hadn't moved, and when you blinked at him, he smiled.

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## Chapter 33: In quegli anni in cui val poco la malpratica ragion

**Author's Notes:** JESUS SORRY
we need some domesticity right now (domesticity ???)

there's also one more chapter until the irene arc but i might add another one
unless you *don't want smut because that's fine too*

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It didn’t take too long for you to get out of the hospital. A normal day consisting of you sleeping through half of it and bitching about leaving as soon as you woke up. Much to your approval, you were discharged without much fanfare. You were able to leave for home, where ~~some sexual healing~~ care and comfort awaited you.

Not a day went by when you didn’t ask about Stanford Stanley. Lestrade had no satisfying answer for you… The whole area around the funeral home had been searched, but not a trace of man could be found, much less a bleeding, raving wreck like Stanley had been when you saw him last. It seemed that he had disappeared–*truly* disappeared. This time you no longer saw him on the street or at the shops. A year ago this would have still bothered you, but now you were far more relaxed. If he crawled back into Hell, then that was fine… you were alone and safe for now, and you could settle down.

Although your shoulder had healed up nicely, Sherlock nevertheless spoiled you until he was satisfied. If there was one piece of toast left, he let you have it… He took you to the opera, although *he* spent the half the time investigating a case while you watched the opera itself… which was fine for you because you could be with him until intermission, and after he’d left you stretched out onto his seat in an unladylike fashion. And, chivalrous as he was, he always undressed you first…

Of course, he was still Sherlock Holmes, and you were careful not to get too lethargic around him–and for good reason. Currently you were half-asleep, curled up in Sherlock’s armchair as the crackling fire lulled you to sleep. Sherlock was pacing, talking to himself (or was he talking to John? He might have been, even though John had left twenty minutes ago) about his latest case involving the death of a zookeeper. You were fading in and out of sleep, and you knew that you must have lost him somewhere because he was talking about digestion systems and chopping up body parts into small pieces. You mumbled in agreement occasionally, shifting to get more comfortable as you dozed off. The case had nothing to do with you, so you didn’t think that he’d ask you a serious question until he was two feet from your face.

“…would that be all right?”

“What?” You blinked sleep away to glare at him. You knew not to blindly agree with anything that Sherlock asked… Last time you’d done *that*, you’d ended up in the shower of a deaf murderer’s house wearing nothing but a trench coat and cha-cha heels. Although he was giving you the puppy eyes, so eager that you could hardly say no, he was *so* excitable that you had no choice but to be suspicious.

“Please?” he pressed. “Just this once.”

“I’d want to know what you asked, but the answer is probably *no* anyway.” You buried yourself back into the chair. “Ask John…”

“No, I need *you*. Actually, I don’t need *you*, specifically. Just something of yours. Isn’t that comforting?”

“No, it’s not… Hey, don’t prod… I’m your fiancée, not your go-to for experiments… You’re a genius, you can find an alternative.” You cracked an eye open. “Just what did you want, anyway?”

“I’m not telling you until you say ‘yes.’”

“That doesn’t even make sense.”

“It makes perfect sense! Just because *you* can’t understand it…”

“Don’t get me started! I remember Bucharest *very* well…” You went to batter him away, but you were so sleepy that you ended up dragging him down and falling asleep onto him, pinning him down and snuggling into him so that he was trapped and lacking an argument until John returned.

He spent an unusual time around your flat over the next two days, not that you minded, but you were still bemused as to what he could need. He didn’t talk about the case anymore, which worried you even further. Sherlock couldn’t *stop* going on about that business, especially if he thought it’d impress you enough to make you talk about how great he was, so when he dropped the subject entirely you wondered just why. You *did* notice that he spent a lot of time around the cage of your hamster, and you could have sworn that he took out a ruler and measured it, but when you came up to ask him what the matter was, he began to rhapsodize about how *lovely* you look, and you knew something was wrong…

You got an emergency call from Lestrade at around six one evening, and you were told that you might have to stay at the office for a while. So you asked Sherlock to make sure your pets were fed, and he said *Yes, of course*, and you left and didn’t return until eight the next morning. You were exhausted, harried, and not exactly in the mood to find a python sitting (sitting?) in the middle of your flat.

“…Darling, what the fuck is *that*?”

“I believe his name is Cheswick. I borrowed him from the zoo,” Sherlock replied, as casual as if explaining why he’d picked up an extra gallon of milk.

“You attained a *python*?”

“Easy enough, really, if you ask the right questions… specifically, asking why a handler spends such an usually amount of time in the goat exhibits. Simple math after that. Did I mention how beautiful you look right now? I don’t mean right now, I mean always. You look tired. You must be in need of rest. Go to bed and I’ll take care of the python.”

You glared at him warily. “It’s not going to eat me, is it?”

“Don’t be absurd. I’d never put you in any sort of risk.” Pause. “Depends on the case, of course. But I assure you that this is not one of those times.”

“I hope you made sure my pets are all right…” You looked high and low for your cat and found him shaking at the top of the fridge, looking incredibly annoyed at not being the royalty of the house anymore. That was good, you knew… And your hamster should be just as fine, considering that he was inside of a safe and protective cage…

Unless… he wasn’t there at all. You practically ripped his cage apart, but you couldn’t find him anywhere. You were shocked. Did he manage to climb out? Did a python actually *motivate* him to do something like that?

“Sherlock!” you cried. “Where’s my hamster?”

“Oh, him? Ah… passed away from old age.”

“What? He was middle-aged!”

“Rodents like that don’t last very long.”

“He was at the prime of his life!” You threw your hands up in the air. “That doesn’t make any sense… What did you do with him?”

“What did *I* do with him? How ridiculous. What makes you think I did anything with him? You’re jumping to conclusions.”

You folded your arms. “I *meant* after he’d passed, but thanks for that. *Now* I want to know what you did to him…”

“Absolutely nothing.”

“Then why did you feel the need to bring a python *here*?”

“John wasn’t being very cooperative. Mrs. Hudson nearly had a heart attack.”

“Then…” You leaned over the python. “Wait, can I come near… *Cheswick*?”

“He’s heavily sedated. Practically asleep.”

You knelt down and peered closely at him. The python seemed nearly drunk, and barely seemed to notice you beside him. What *you* noticed was a very prominent lump…

“Sherlock, I swear to God… This python better have a tumor.”

“Um… That is… Of course, the purpose was to observe the python’s eating habits. And your hamster–”

“Did *nothing*!” you cried. “He was just stuck in the middle of one of your schemes…”

“It was not a *scheme*, it was an *experiment.*”

“Same thing!”

“Yes, well, sweetheart, the zoo commends you for your assistance in solving the murder of one of its finest workers. Congratulations, condolences, and so on.”

“I don’t want to be congratulated, I want my baby back!” You hesitantly poked the lump in the python and it seemed to twitch feebly. “My God! I think he’s still alive–!”

“Improbable…”

“Wow! He never did anything to you…!”

He looked surprised that his murder would get such a reaction. “Are you *upset*?”

“Lovely deduction!” You would have started to yell, but you didn’t actually want the python to spring back into life. So you huffed and grumbled and slept off your time at the office.

When you woke, the python was gone, as was the cage of your old hamster. In its place was a new cage–a cage inhabited by a brand-new, fluffy rabbit that milled about and tripped over its own ears when it went to look up at you.

You met Sherlock at the door. He looked about as sheepish as he could be capable of, caught off-guard: he’d intended to leave before you noticed his gesture. Now he had to endure your belief that he'd done it to make it up to you, which was true, but of course he'd never say it...

“They have longer lifespans… than hamsters,” he explained lamely, staring at his watch. “Agreeable diets. Very economical. Don’t get two.”

“Sherlock…” You smiled a little and tugged at his lapels, a clear signal for what you wanted. “That was a fluffy thing for you to do.”

“I am not… *fluffy*,” he spat. “It was the sort of gesture that John would advise me to do. You’re my intended, and it’s congenial to replace things you’ve used. Besides, it’s all a matter of course. If I ever need to use another animal as feed, then I have a variety of sizes to choose from. And–”

“Will you shut up before I hate you for killing my hamster?!” You pulled him down for a kiss. “All right–if you walk out of here without saying another word, this will all end fine.”

“Actually,” he mused close to you, “I think that I’d rather go for your cat next. He had the gall to scratch me when I put him up on the fridge. Ungrateful little cretin.”

“Takes one to *know* one.”

“One more word from you and I’ll *take* you on the *floor* and I guarantee that you won’t be happy about it.”

“Who are *you* to decide if…” You trailed off. “No! Not in front of the rabbit. She’s new here, she doesn’t *understand*, and if you don’t get your hand out of there this *instant* I’ll phone Lestrade to report a murder, and five minutes from now he’ll…”

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## Chapter 34: Quam pulchra es

**Author's Notes:** i just thought
well
i just wanted to
OKAY

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If he only *asked*, he could have it almost whenever he wanted it. (Or, as he put it, *needed* it, for *cognitive reassembling* and *psychosomatic exercise*) But Sherlock Holmes, as you knew, had the communication skills of a bitchy cat and he didn’t bother working on them. Fortunately, he occasionally made his wants obvious...

He was staring at you–something he often did without your notice, given the fact that you were often easily distracted. You were staring with wonder at his bookshelf, marveling at the array of titles he had. Suicidology? That would be good reading for work… Something by Lavinia Smith… Books about Ruth Ellis and serial killers… why hadn’t you looked through this collection before? Such a gold mine! You wondered if he’d notice you spiriting several books away, and you knew he would, but still… …and meanwhile, Sherlock was lying on his sofa, watching you, pretending to be contemplating something related to his latest case. Oh, he’d solved that cases *ages* ago, he just needed motivation to wrap it up properly. Right now, there were more important matters on his mind…

Namely–the way it looked when you crossed and uncrossed your legs. You were sitting in *his* chair, after all, and that seemed to make it better. There was something odd about the fabric of your tights, though… Something about it, and… it took him a moment to realize the glorious fact–the moment when your skirt hiked up just a fraction more. You weren’t wearing tights, no! That magnificent patch of exposed skin on your thighs… you weren’t wearing tights, you were wearing–*stockings*… He found that fact much more intriguing than he should have, and he wondered if it should be strange that he found a sudden preference for such an inconsequential article of clothing. …Whatever! Sex had been easier to deal with when he didn’t care about it at all, and now he had another thing to make him unnecessarily desperate. He was so crunched for time that he hadn’t been with you in several days now, and even *then* had been quick and quiet due to A) time constraints and B) the fact that New Scotland Yard was on the other side of the broom cupboard’s door.

And you, of course, were none the wiser. You were totally absorbed in the book, not paying any attention to your equally engrossed fiancé. You did look up once to glance at him, and when you noticed that he was watching you, you smiled, although you weren’t aware of the effect that this had on him. Mrs. Hudson was out, but Sherlock became acutely aware of his flatmate’s presence in the room and knew that he’d have to remedy that presence soon.

“John,” he said quite suddenly, the first time he’d spoken in nearly an hour.

“Yes, Sherlock?”

“We’re out of milk.”

“…all right?”

Sherlock turned his head to glare at him, impatient. “So go pick some up.”

“Right *now*?” He sighed. “Sherlock, I was just *out*. It wouldn’t have been hard to text me to tell me *then*…”

And then, as if on cue, Sherlock’s mobile: “Ahh~”

You twitched. “Sherlock, I swear to *God* that I’m going to microwave that thing if it makes that fucking noise again.”

John couldn’t pass that one up. “It’s funny, you know, it really *is* a *fucking noise*–”

“Milk!” you interjected, eager to get away from this topic entirely. “There’s a case on, right? Right. I’m the least useful person in the room, so I’ll go get it.”

“No, no,” John insisted charitably, getting up. “As doctor and friend, I forbid you from doing lifting until your shoulder heals up completely. It won’t take me more than fifteen, twenty minutes.”

“My shoulder’s not bad, I promise… It’s been a few weeks, it’s really well!”

And then Sherlock fired off a list of possible (and largely exaggerated) calamities that could result from you doing easy lifting and carrying, which only helped for John’s argument, and you relented.

“John, you’re too nice. Nearly perfect. One of these days I’m going to find a flaw with you.” Pause. “Sherlock, don’t give me that look…”

John bid you farewell and left the flat. Sherlock waited patiently for a few moments until he was certain that his flatmate was a generous distance away. Only when he was satisfied did he say, “We have some time.”

“Time?” You looked around, bemused, still not catching on to the fact that your fiancé had been lusting after you for at least forty-five minutes. “Time for what?”

Sherlock steepled his fingers. “I’d say fifteen minutes, but if he hurries or there’s no line, it could be as little as twelve. But he’ll invariably pick something else up, giving us closer to sixteen or seventeen…”

You were still confused until Sherlock looked right at you, and in that mere glance you knew exactly what you wanted. And you almost cursed him for being able to arouse you with a single glance, because there was nothing graceful at all about slamming a book down and tripping out of your knickers to get over to him. You were never really certain about topping him, due to the paranoia that you'd crush him or something, but it was something that he occasionally insisted upon, and right now you were feeling the need and wouldn't complain with whatever he wanted.

You sort of ripped his trousers and pants down, aching further at the sight of him already half-hard just from watching you. You kissed him as you began to straddle him, aggressive and demanding, and by the time he was satisfied with feeling you up and slipping his fingers under the elastic of your stockings (and after he was out of breath from your snogging), he was primed and ready for you to align yourself on top of him.

Only when you were comfortable on top of him did he open his eyes, and the sight of him staring up at you was a bit intoxicating–you wondered why you didn't do this more often. You ran your hands across his chest, experimenting with balance until you found just the right angle to sink down onto him. It had been too long since a proper shag (or, at least *you* thought so), and even just him inside of you felt utterly spectacular. He was feeling it, too–he was biting back a moan from only this, his baritone lowering a bit as he adjusted to the feel of you around him.

After a few moments of you getting used to the pressure inside of you, Sherlock began to get impatient, and as you felt him pulse inside of you, he began to tremble and writhe as you remained still. Although you grinded a bit against him, you liked the sight of him moaning and helpless a bit more than you'd have imagined, and you waited until he was practically thrashing around beneath you before you started to move, watching as he became unraveled and undone with every rise and fall of your hips.

Your initial pace was not… *languid*, to say the least. You chose a pace about as aggressive as your kissing, pulling your hips back and then snapping them down, a weightless feeling coursing through your body with every push. He hadn't been expecting you to be so lively and was unprepared for you, and he cried out every time you did it, his head rolling helplessly as he stroked your thighs. His voice broke as he practically begged you for something, although he wasn't coherent enough to give you a full sentence.

You changed your pace without warning, slowing your near-vicious fucking of him until you moved up and down on him with maddening leisure. There may have been a complaint somewhere in his groaning encouragements, but you could hardly tell as you leaned forward to stroke and kiss him wherever you pleased. Your sudden slowing after your previous head-spinning pace only added to the near-obscene noises that he was making, and after a minute or two he could hardly stand it. He clutched at the edge of the sofa until his knuckles were white before moving his hands onto you, sliding them down your waist until they gripped your hips. You had no objections to him taking over the pace, and you could only groan as he found a rhythm that was softer, yet the right speed to make your thighs tremble.

It didn't take you long to reach a perfect angle, shivering at the feeling of Sherlock repeatedly thrusting into a spot so sensitive that you were close to mewling whenever he pressed against it. Now that he was more comfortable with the pace, he let his hands roam you, fondling your breasts to make you arch. After he was satisfied at the sight of *you* becoming debauched for a change, he dragged his fingers down to merely touch your clit, leading you to buck and cry out his name. Which is your mistake, of course–that's practically his favorite part, and he stroked you in earnest until you were practically begging for him to keep touching you.

He moved his hands back to your hips as he got close, thrusting faster into you as he quickened the rise and fall of your hips. He squeezed your hips involuntarily every time you tightened around him, and he knew that you wouldn't outlast him–and he was correct, naturally. With a shudder that ran up your whole body like a river, you were finished, rocking against him with a cross between a sigh and a moan. Beneath you, he was making soft cries of frenzy, but he didn't come until you looked down and balanced unsteadily on his chest. Your pleasure was making you a bit woozy, and it was only doubled when you felt him come hard into you, his release dragged out by yours.

When it finished you nearly fell over, and you eased yourself off and then on top of him, resting briefly on his chest as you rose and fell with his deep breaths. Against your ear, you could feel his heart thundering against his ribs, slowing down gradually until he reached equilibrium. He pet you clumsily, hands shaking from the sensations. After a short while you raised your head and propped up your chin on your hands, watching him–he was already watching you, pupils still blown.

His hands roamed under your skirt, groping that celebrated rear, moving until he traced your still-sensitive clit to make you jump before resting on your thighs. He idly snapped the elastic of your stockings against your thighs, asking, "And what brought these on?"

"I didn't have any good tights or pantyhose to wear," you replied, a little embarrassed. "I like stockings, really… But I thought that nobody would notice–my skirt was long enough…"

Sherlock smirked. "Wear them more often."

"What? You have a fetish?"

He said nothing, only taking your left hand and bringing it to his mouth, lazily kissing your fingers while paying special attention to his favorite–your little finger's neighbor. You sighed as reality came upon you and stretched out a bit.

"How much time do we have left?"

"Hmm…" It took Sherlock a moment to recall, after all of that. "Only about two minutes. Three if he's dragging his feet."

Your little noises of complaint made him laugh, and you kissed him before sliding off and readjusting your clothes. After the two of you had been properly cleaned up, you crossed the room on wobbly legs and regained your position on Sherlock's chair.

"That was nice, you know," you said, pouting. "We should do that more often. I miss you when you have cases."

"It's just about over," he admitted. "I'll come to you tonight. You don't have work tomorrow, do you…? So don't go to bed early."

And he said this so casually that he might have been talking about plans to go to the park, and you growled at him to please *not* get you hot and bothered right before his flatmate arrived or else he'd find himself dragged back to his room. As soon as you opened up your book to resume reading–although you could hardly focus on it–John opened the door and announced his entrance.

"Sorry about that delay, I was picking something else up," John told you, and across the room you noticed Sherlock's mouth twitch up in a smirk. "There was a sale on eggs–you said you needed some, right?" He stopped. "Don't tell me you two haven't moved since I left?"

"John, you're darling," you gushed, ignoring that last question. "I'll have to do something nice for you in return. I'll take them, they're light enough, aren't they…?"

And as you traipsed off to gather your belongings, John glanced at you, and then Sherlock. He wondered just what you two got up to when he wasn't around… it had to be *something*, after all, but he couldn't imagine that the consulting detective was anything short of a dry, textbook lover. That being said, he'd made a point to stay out late whenever you were visiting Sherlock in the evening, but still… Sherlock Holmes didn't seem the type to do those youthful teenage flings, which John supposed wasn't *bad* or anything...

…and of course, his back was turned when you passed Sherlock and the latter grabbed your rear with the knowledge that you couldn't squeal. But John was fine with his own beliefs, yes, perhaps it was better that he didn't know…

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## Chapter 35: Tu che fedel

**Author's Notes:** So this was supposed to be a really breezy domestic filler chapter but I was impatient so I segued right to Irene because it's close to Christmas and there's nothing better than *BBC Sherlock Christmas cheer*

so i see a lot of new sherlock stories out and at first i'm all "yeah great new stories to read!!!!" and then i read them and realize that they're such quality
and then i look back at what i've written
"when you try your best but you don't succeed"

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There was a reason for the state that you and Sherlock showed up in one day at New Scotland Yard. Both of you were heavily congested and feverish, sneezing simultaneously and hitting each other on the back when one had a coughing fit. It wasn't always like this, true… If it hadn't been for your fiancé, you would have been fine, but…

Just the previous day, you were the healthiest you'd ever been. You rarely got sick, and even then would be only some sniffles due to the changing weather… and at your sickest it still wasn't bad enough to keep you in bed, and you liked your work so much that you would come in anyway, pale and withering and ready for action. But, apparently, not everyone had your fortified immune system.

You were at home when you got the text–*I'm sorry to bother you, but Sherlock's being difficult and I don't have time to mother him. Mind coming over for a little while to make sure he doesn't cough out a lung? —JW*

Although you were inclined to reply with a drawn-out *Noooooo* due to your reluctance to pull on some trousers, you glanced at your new rabbit and knew that you'd only feel guilty if Sherlock was sick and you didn't go out to see him. You didn't have anything better to do, and it was the least you could do for a man you still weren't quite sure you deserved. (…although that didn't quite stop you from hardly dressing, picking up a clean-looking skirt and jumper from the floor and determining them to be good enough to wear)

You entered 221B as John looked ready to leave. You kicked off your boots and asked what the matter was with Sherlock.

"He's got a bad cold and he refuses to acknowledge it," John replied with a sigh. "He won't take any medicine, he won't eat, he won't sleep. I've got a date to get to, and though I'm a doctor, I'd rather not *have* to be one to my grown flatmate."

"It's December, after all… He's bound to get a little fever in the winter, right? I'll make sure he's all right, you go off with–Yvonne, right? The one with the nose like a…"

"No, no, I broke it off with her," John interjected, sheepish for a reason you couldn't possibly guess. "I'm dating a Jeanette now."

"Wow! Well, uh, good for you." You patted him on the back. "Where is he?"

"In his room… Really, I can't thank you enough for this. He refuses to get any rest…"

"Oh, you know how he is… He'd work himself silly if he had the opportunity… Even if there is no case. Go out and have a nice time…"

When John left, you thought about making some soup for Sherlock, but decided to check up on him first. As you turned to go down the hall to his room, you heard that fucking unmistakable and incredibly uncomfortable noise from nearby…

"Ahh~"

"Jesus Christ!" You gave the phone a withering glare, as if you could get it to shut up. Curiosity got the better of you, and you darted off to pick up his phone. You told yourself that "it's wrong for people in a relationship to check each other's phones without permission," just so you were aware of your wrongdoing as you did it.

*Even you have got to eat. Let's have dinner.*

You twitched. You weren't an idiot–you knew what *let's have dinner* meant. ~~"A full order of meat"~~ And since you knew that it was Irene Adler sending them, you were less than pleased about her sending him ten texts a week. If it had been a female friend or a client, you would have been fine with it, but it didn't take a mathematician to know that Irene Adler wanted to shag the hell out of your fiancé, and that didn't exactly fly with you. By the looks of it, she'd sent him around fifty of those messages, most of which had that vaguely sexual tone–that, or they were outright invitations to her bed. You didn't think that he'd have actually replied to any, but he hadn't talked to you about them… He changed the subject whenever you brought it up, and that made you suspicious. If It had annoyed Sherlock, he would have made some bitchy remark about it… But he hadn't…

Sulking and keeping a dark cloud over your head, you went over to Sherlock's room. Truth be told, you'd basically forgotten about his illness and you were ready to go in there, guns blazing, and confront him about the whole issue. True, the whole thing should have been Irene's fault, but since you had no idea who or where she was, you had no choice but to opt for the nearest party. And he was in his room, none the wiser and as you threw open his door you knew that you wouldn't be the least opposed to…

…well, that was your line of thinking, but as you opened is door with vehemence and a great deal of air in your lungs, you lost your fight as soon as you saw him. He was lying on his bed, in his usual position of deep thought, except he didn't look quite as content as usual. He was pale, paler than usual, and his brow was deeply furrowed. When you approached him, he opened his eyes to slits and contemplated you blearily.

"I thought I heard some commotion. No doubt John was blathering on about this insignificant condition and thought it prudent to drag you over for some babysitting." He tried to look you over to deduce you, as he always did, but he ended up wincing and sighing. "I can see you're not quite eager, given the secondhand state of your clothing. I'm hardly worth you dragging yourself out when you were clearly sleeping before. An unbearable migraine... Keeping me from doing my work."

"Sherlock, you don't even have work to do."

"I always do… All the time. Even a day off would cause my brain to rot… And now I have no choice but sit here in this silence without the slightest deduction, or else my head will hurt twice as worse than before… A fallacy of these weak, fleshy *shells*…"

"That may be true, sweetheart, but that weak and fleshy shell of yours needs some rest…" You couldn't help but smile just a bit. "It's very strange to hear the great consulting detective be a bit congested… Why don't I get you some medicine?"

"I don't need anything!" he snapped. "I'm perfectly fine. Headaches pass. You're absolutely useless at the moment, good for nothing but filling the comfortable, silent air with irritating *noise*–"

"Oh, don't be cruel." Your voice was low, soothing, as you approached him. "I came to help you. Just stay still… You're not going to get any better by not taking anything. Are you running a fever? Let me take your temperature."

"I'm perfectly fine… My temperature is no more than a one-ninth degree higher than it should be… Nothing to fuss over…"

His migraine was so bad that he could hardly move when you sat down beside him on the bed. Settling his head onto your inner thigh, you pushed his curls aside and felt his forehead, frowning at what you ended up finding. "Sherlock, you're burning up."

"I'll be fine," he insisted, although a bit more weakly than before. "I'll be perfectly fine…"

Against his obstinacy, you smiled. "You do realize that it's not a chore for me to take care of you? And I should hope so. *In sickness and in health* is kind of a big deal to some people."

"But we aren't yet married, and there's not yet any legal obligation for you to hover over me as if I'm dying…"

"I'll blame your mood on your sickness," you determined with a nod, wiping sweat away from his brow. "But, remember, if I didn't love you, I'd roll you right off the bed. I'll be right back."

You scampered off to get him some meds. You knew that Sherlock Holmes probably wouldn't stock any on pure basis that he didn't want to rely on anything, but you figured that Mrs. Hudson and John were a bit more conscientious. After some scavenging, you found something that would help his headache and put him to sleep, and you took it to him with a glass of water.

Coaxing him to tilt his head so he wouldn't choke, you finally got the medicine down his throat. You set the glass aside and settled him so that he'd be comfortable–which meant his head on your lap, a position he requested often, and for *vastly* differing reasons. His migraine was still present, and of course, he had to point it out to you.

"I told you that medicine doesn't work… It's a crutch… My immune system shouldn't have to depend on such…"

"Won't you just be quiet?" He was in such a vulnerable position, though, and you couldn't help but stroke at his face, a gesture he would have pinned as *sentimental* if he weren't in such pain. He became more relaxed, although his migraine hadn't improved yet.

"You're still feverish, and you should put something easy into your stomach before you get to sleep." You shifted and got up off the bed. "I'll go make you some soup and I'll be back before the medicine makes you drowsy… How does that sound?"

And he surprised you with a "no…" and reached over blindly to grab at your skirt.

"Don't go," he pleaded in a near-feeble tone, and you were so stunned that you were almost suspicious.

"I didn't give you strong a dose, did I? I think you're becoming too drowsy." But you didn't leave. "I thought you didn't even want me to come over?"

"I'm not hungry… already ate…"

"No, I gave you the proper dose… I think you're feverish!"

"Head… still *hurts*…"

Sherlock was usually so above you that it was always a surprise to see him so vulnerable, to see him actually need you. You'd spent so much time worrying over whether or not he'd leave you that it hadn't struck you that he might actually think of you of something other than a pleasant distraction. He could need you to take care of him, and he could complain but he might not always mean it… You cursed a bit to yourself. As disagreeable and aloof as your fiancé tended to be, he could still soften you up, even when he'd been an ass mere minutes before…

"It's all right," you said, trying not to sound as goopy as you felt. "Lie back down, you'll make it worse… It must be a bad migraine…"

He was too strained to even give you a proper retort, giving you a good indication of his condition. Murmuring for him to just *relax* already and stop *thinking*, you made sure he was comfortable before crawling up and over him. When he cracked open his eyes again, he found you practically bowing on him, knees on either side of him, contemplating him with your hands kneading his chest.

"You really are burning up," you scolded softly. "I can feel it through your clothes… It's a surprise the bed isn't on fire."

When he sighed, you rose and fell on his chest. You smiled and moved yourself up a little bit more. Before he could mumble a question, you reached up to his temples, massaging them with gentle fingers. He said nothing as you did it, and merely focused on your pressure easing him out of his migraine. You stayed that way for a long while, focusing on his face and the way the lines in it faded over time. You did think that you were annoying him a bit, being so close with him unable to protest, but whenever you stopped to make yourself a bit more comfortable, he made soft noises of complaint and you continued.

After a half-hour or so, you could see him getting a bit drowsy as the medicine took effect. He looked relaxed now, and you knew that he'd probably be ready to get to sleep soon. Once he really was starting to go under, you eased yourself off of him. Although you expected him to be too lethargic to even move, he became animated surprisingly quickly, grabbing handfuls of clothing and bringing you back down to him.

You were about to praise him for such intimacy when he began to speak, slow and unsteady. "Gestation period of an Asian elephant is 616 days… Some languages in West Africa do not mark past tense… You brushed your hair seventeen strokes today…"

You made a noise of fond exasperation and let him practically hold you to the bed. He would hate this upon waking and make a big fuss over it, but until then, he was as docile as a sedated animal. He bussed his lips over yours in a brief kiss and buried his face into your neck. Now and again he'd mumble that he knew what you were planning on getting for Christmas, and when you asked him what he was getting you, he very nearly told you before you told him to be quiet. The drugs made him suggestible, and it hurt you that the very first thing you considered was asking him about Irene. He would probably tell you everything, but you didn't want to know–not when he was in this state. But whether it was because you didn't want to take advantage of him or because you didn't want to know the whole truth–

With a deep breath, you opened your mouth and prepared to ask him. The moment you did, his breath was a hot complaint on your neck, huffs and rasps as he bit back a cough. You stopped, and it was only when his forehead was against your cheek did you realize just how hot Sherlock really was. He was definitely burning up–running a bad fever. No wonder he hadn't gotten any medicine–with that and the migraine, he probably hadn't the energy to get up off the bed. He'd always had a high metabolism and kept you warm, but now he was putting out heat like a furnace. He'd sounded a bit sore and congested, but only looking back did you realize that it had been worse than you'd thought…

"Why did you try to act like you were all right?" you demanded inaudibly, shifting so that he was more comfortable. "You know that I would have helped. Why…?"

And what did it matter? You were the one who'd been trying to accuse him of… of *something* related to that Irene Adler. He was sick and all you could care about was some woman! And he'd been ill and he was the one trying to put you at ease, trying to get you to go away so that you wouldn't have to fuss over him. You… even when you were trying to put him to sleep, you still thought about Irene, you'd still wanted to ask him about it… *Terrible, you're awful, what kind of a fiancée are you…?!*

Hot tears sprang to your eyes, but they weren't bad enough that they couldn't be batted away. You were tired, just tired, but now Sherlock was asleep and you could relax. The texts were still there and still arriving, and for all you knew, she was sending them right now, wanting to seduce your future husband. But he was there, right there, holding you out of medicinal craze and muttering nonsense in his sleep. For now, he was all yours. For now it was all right, yes, for now…

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## Chapter 36: Jouluyö, juhlayö

**Author's Notes:** So I heard that these were happy times
merry christmas
ho ho ho

Although you weren't really the type of woman to listen to Christmas music in mid-November, you still enjoyed the holiday and the way it accumulated some of your guilty pleasures: lazily dressing in chunky sweaters, giving enough gifts to make a mass of people happy at once, and giving into soft and glowing sentiment by lighting some candles and settling down on the rug in front of a fire. You'd already made a fruitcake that was so disastrous that you could bludgeon a man to death with it… you'd put your tree up and were too lazy to fix it when your cat traversed it. And since you'd already given gifts to your co-worker friends, you took your time to wrap the presents you got for your fiancé and his flatmate.

Sherlock had been increasingly distracted as of late, probably due to the volume of flirtatious/invitational texts, but you made your best effort to take the high road. You'd never wanted to be the kind of girlfriend who snidely accused her man of affairs. There was nothing new on the western front, and he hadn't even seen her since that one day, so you saw no reason to be so paranoid and suspicious…It was Christmas and you should relax and unwind. There were no foreseeable obstacles to just one evening of comfy pleasure and happiness…

Such things were, of course, difficult with such a fiancé. "Oh, everybody's saying *hullo* to each other… How *wonderful*!"

And it was at that moment when you'd scampered up to him, pressing a soft kiss to his cheek. "Hullo, Sherlock."

"E-Evening."

You did think that the beginning of the evening went well–aside from Sherlock forgetting Jeanette's name and you accidentally implying that she was a lesbian. Molly looked fantastic in her dress, in contrast to your oversized sweater that nearly covered your short skirt. You left to take a Christmas call from your father and upon your return, you found the whole room staring awkwardly at each other and Sherlock checking the mantel.

"What's happened?" you asked Molly, who seemed a bit shaken and consuming more wine than she should be. "I don't understand…"

At once you saw what Sherlock was holding–a present you'd never noticed before, wrapped in paper of a rather gorgeous shade. But as soon as you saw it in the firelight, you recognized it immediately… *Blood red.* Of course you remembered *that* shade, a memento of that day you found another woman's lipstick on your fiancé. It was hers, *hers*, and that revelation almost physically struck you, and you sat down heavily on the armchair next to the fire. Irene. Irene *Adler.* She had invaded even this spot of yours, this time when you thought you could be at your happiest. And hadn't she been hanging around the two of you like a cloud, an ugly border around a beautiful painting… To think you assumed that you could ignore it, hah! That was your own mistake, your own fatal *error*…

John went off to follow Sherlock to his room, but you stayed in place, numbly pulling the ribbon off of Molly's present for you. You didn't want to hear what the news with Irene was–you didn't want to be a part of it. This was a side of your fiancé that was none of your business, and you only realized that fact after months of telling yourself that there was no part of him that he couldn't hide from you...

"Oh, Molly!" It was a lovely new scarf; no doubt a product of you teaching her how to knit during your breaks. "It's so beautiful. I think you're better than *me* now–why, I'll wear it walking out of here."

"That? Oh, it was nothing!" She laughed a little nervously. "I just wanted to get you something nice–those earrings you got me were splendid. *That*… It's probably nothing compared to what Sherlock got you, but…"

"What Sherlock got me?"

It took you a long moment to reply, only because the truth sinking in took a moment to comprehend. But you did understand it, which numbed the pain a bit. You were very calm and levelheaded when you said, "No, he didn't get me anything. He probably never even thought about it–about me."

She grew a great deal redder. "Ah! I'm s-s-s-s–"

"It's all *right*, Molly," because it was, in a way. "You know how he is."

Sherlock came back out of his room, claiming that he needed to go to the morgue, and Molly scurried off, still mortified by whatever happened while you were out. You still felt numb by the night's events, but you couldn't simply let him go without a word. You stopped Sherlock before he left. You were at a loss for words as soon as you spoke, but you figured something out nonetheless.

"Sherlock, what's happening? You have to tell me."

"There's been an incident concerning a woman that doesn't concern you," was his reply. "I'll be back before long."

But you weren't satisfied–something was nagging at you and you had a hard time quelling it. "Why won't you just *talk* to me?" you pleaded. "You can't just keep dodging questions that involve Irene."

At most, he was apathetic to your restrained desperation… Or perhaps he wasn't too apathetic, but he had something more important on his mind. "It's never bothered you before to be left out of work-related business."

"This isn't about a client, Sherlock… This isn't about a case; that's your own business. It's between you and me, don't you realize it? Please, don't leave; I just want to talk to you…"

“There’s nothing to discuss,” he assured, trying his best to maintain a pacifying tone. “I need to leave.”

“Just how important is she? You can *tell* me, I just want to understand! I just *need* to understand…”

But Sherlock did not tell you–he left, without another word, without a fond farewell or anything else that could have calmed you. You sighed and plopped down on the couch, watching the fire die as the rest of the guests bid their farewells and departed for other engagements. It was you and John now, the latter immediately sensing your overwhelming disappointment.

“It’s too much, you know,” he remarked, examining the wristwatch you gave him. “How expensive was it?”

“Don’t worry about it… My sister’s married to a salesman. I could get you truckloads, but it’d be a bit shady.”

“Did Sherlock open what you got him?”

Only then did you realize that your gifts for him were still right next to you. Oh–! It wouldn’t be too hard. His birthday was early in January, and you could always rewrap them with new paper… Or maybe you could just skip the event entirely; maybe he’d be busy…

“No.”

“Oh! Sorry, you know how he is…”

“What? No, no…” You closed your eyes. “I guess I was being selfish… Too demanding and practically stereotypical.”

“Don’t beat yourself up over it. He’s an ass.”

“I understand, he’s in the middle of something important… Yes, important…” Yes–he had left for something more important than you, and there was no way around it. There wasn’t anything to be ashamed of… It was just how life went on. Irene Adler was above you just for now, victorious even in her supposed death, worth more of his time and effort. Of course! Well, she had captivated him, after all… None of your business… None of it was *your* business…

After a time, your phone rang and you felt startled, ashamed, as if someone was closely watching your malcontent. You jumped a bit and answered your phone, hanging up a few minutes later with a sigh.

“I have to go,” you told John.

“What? Where?”

“Frances is smashed out of her mind, sobbing over the phone… She’s got that sort of business with her boyfriend, and I’m going to check up on her, make sure she doesn’t make any drunken calls, turn her on her side if she needs it… You know how it goes.”

“But you’re coming back, right?” John got up from his seat. “Sherlock will probably need help when he gets back–it’ll probably be a danger night…”

You were guilty, if only a bit, but the sound of it made you laugh a little harshly. “*Me*? As if Sherlock Holmes could need help from me. No… You and Mrs. Hudson will be just fine. I’m sure he’ll just get annoyed if I hover around him for the whole night.”

“But… You don’t want to spend Christmas alone, do you?”

Oh! What else had you been doing all night? “I’ll survive, John… Besides, there’s always next Christmas, hopefully nothing will come up then. Until then I can relive my bachelorette days, holding back hair and keeping my cat off of the tree… Lovely evening, thank you for the jumper–it’s only fair. Have a lovely Christmas.”

“Yes! You too…”

You took the long route to Frances’s place, reveling in the sight of London at Christmastime. Just about everyone looked lovely and happy, all smiles, cheeks reddened from the cold. You might have looked the same, idly swinging a tote with gifts meant for someone–and surely you were on your way to give them to someone, right? Surely you were on your way to a nice, cozy party, an evening full of wine and soft laughter and bad jokes…

A car passed and you heard the edge of a song, and since no one else was around, you didn’t feel self-conscious in singing the rest of the line. Perhaps your voice was a bit flat due to the cold, but in the end it didn’t matter, since you were alone.

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# Chapter 37: Voi che sapete che cosa è amor

**Author's Notes:** i. omfg best of 2012 i'm going to cry and i'm serious ???? i want to break into all of your rooms and kiss you but half of you would arrest me
ii. i received a lot of support and i'm sorry for things i've said ??? like i don't want you to think that i hate everything i write but i just feel blues-y sometimes? like, sometimes i like what i write but then i read "neither a soldier nor a gentleman" and i'm like dr. seuss but i can't rhyme or draw
iii. the sherlock timeline is so fucked up and i'm using it to my advANTAGE
iv. i didn't realize it was sherlock's birthday today wow HAHA NEXT CHAPTER REA-TAN GETS TO MEET IRENE HEUEHUEH
v. i made this mix judging by how much songs made me hurt

Your relationship with Sherlock was strained for a while, but you supposed that it was to be expected. It wasn't as if you could simply go back to the way things were–but you were sure that normalcy could gradually return, like… like warm weather in the change of seasons! There had been a long winter, so what? You'd been upset with Sherlock, sure, but you didn't hate him… Of course you could forgive him! There was hardly anything to forgive him for!

But that fact didn't mean that situations improved between you and Sherlock. Ever since the night when he found out about Irene Adler's death, he had spent most of his days with silence and no food. You'd tried to prod him into a conversation; you'd tried to get him just to talk about the whole affair. But your fiancé was stubborn in his silence, and some days he refused to even look your way. He spent his time composing music, much to your frustration… and you felt so selfish over it. He never wrote music for you, not once, not ever. The thought had probably never even crossed his mind! And he was writing music for Irene, that woman, *the* woman, in mourning. He was mourning her! All he was thinking about was her; that was why he would never look at you or John. The Woman had transfixed him, impressed him! You hated yourself through it all. You had actually felt *happy* when you'd heard she'd been killed… You'd *wanted* her dead! You had met someone who could qualify as competition and you wanted her dead… It hadn't made a difference either way. It had made it *worse*! A lose-lose situation. You felt like the scum of the Earth, and most days you went home without a farewell, tired and hating yourself.

You spent New Year's Eve holding back Frances's hair again, seeing as how she was drinking herself out of joy of getting back together with her boyfriend. She was so happy and lovestruck that you were almost envious, and you felt guilty. She could work out those intermittent problems with her boyfriend, but–the two of them fought much more frequently than you and Sherlock, right? Sherlock could practically predict your tantrums and defused them before they could begin. You had a relatively better relationship, then. But, then… What were you supposed to do, when he wouldn't talk to you and you had no idea what to say?

After getting a call from John, though, you rushed right over to 221B and practically kicked down the ~~open~~ door. You'd only heard that Americans had broken in, abusing Mrs. Hudson and threatening your fiancé. By the time you arrived, though, you realized that the situation was already over. Everyone was fine, and…

"You might want to sit down for this," John said.

"John, I come here with the knowledge that Sherlock threw someone out the window no less than three times. I'm pretty sure I can take whatever's coming."

"Well, um… It's about Irene Adler…" He scratched at his head, not wanting to be the one to tell you. "She's… alive." Pause. "What's that look for? Wait, *no* don't…!" And another. "Are you going to leave so soon? Don't you want to see your…?"

All right, all right, you could *deal* with this. You had felt a searing flash of anger when you heard that Irene Adler had faked her death, and you felt bad enough about that, but–Sherlock wouldn't be depressed now, right? He'd talk to you, and even if he mentioned Irene, it would be preferable to that stony silence when he thought she was dead. Yes… He'd be happier knowing that she was alive…

You considered taking a vacation through Sherlock's birthday just so you wouldn't have to deal with it, but you felt selfish just thinking about it and you stayed in London. You re-wrapped his Christmas presents in birthday wrapping and it all worked out fine–it felt like a load off of your back. Sherlock was his usually twat-ish self, although you were grateful just to see him back to normal. He was a bit distracted, though, and you knew that you could credit it to Irene. But you supposed that Sherlock would hardly notice an absence of your usual affection, so you didn't trouble him, and left him to his own devices. …well! He had never depended on you, and you had never depended on anyone… So neither you nor Sherlock was truly suffering…

You'd expected things to return to normal with Sherlock, but they didn't. He was no longer moody, but he still wouldn't talk to you about Irene–he hardly talked to you about anything. He didn't treat you badly, sure, but he just didn't seem interested in carrying on with you as he used to. You could tell that he was thinking of the password to Irene Adler's phone. You couldn't guess it… But then again, you doubted that you were cleverer than Irene. If you were, then Sherlock would certainly be paying attention to you. That did make some more sense–he had found someone who impressed him more, and he was more interested. Well, fine! You were still engaged; that part hadn't changed. You'd ridden out storms before, and you could do the same to this one.

You were still a bit curious about Irene, though, and you couldn't help yourself. "So how did Irene Adler fake her death, anyway?"

Sherlock stared at you like you were drooling on your blouse–a look which, to be fair, you were used to. "She knew that I knew her measurements. She merely had to provide a corpse with an identical body."

"Oh!" You slapped a newspaper open and glanced through it. "And, of course, you memorized her measurements."

"Well, yes." He eyed you warily. "They were the password to her safe."

"And you would have noticed her measurements immediately–when she was stark naked." You cleared your throat and folded your legs. "Hmm."

"What is it?"

"It's just… Wow! It would be strange. You don't care about the solar system, but you're well-versed in identifying a lady's measurements with a single glance." You looked over at him. "Or was it longer than a single glance? But I guess I couldn't blame you… A gorgeous lady in front of you, in her birthday suit, no less! What good fortune you have, Mr. Holmes… Very lucky."

He shifted, visibly uncomfortable for once. "I told you already, I don't *care* about those… *matters*."

"Maybe not, sure… But…"

Sherlock was leaning a little towards you, as if anticipating your next words–but you didn't finish. You didn't much *want* to. You felt terrible, but you didn't want to say something that you'd regret, so you stopped. The more Irene Adler became a problem, the less you wanted to deal with it, and you were tired of upsetting yourself for no reason. But the longer you let Irene simmer on the back burner, the closer you felt Sherlock Holmes draw towards her. And you were being dragged by the wind, floating to France, away, away…

But, what! If Sherlock Holmes liked Irene Adler, what could you do about it? You couldn't twist him around to face you… You couldn't force him to like you better, and you couldn't make him not be impressed by Irene Adler. You wished that you could be clever than your brief rival–but you weren't, and it frustrated you to no end. There was no way to start a conversation on her without sounding like everything you tried not to be–a jealous, shrill, and overbearing fiancée. But as far as you knew, Sherlock hadn't seen Irene in person yet, and perhaps that was at least *sort of* good luck for you…

By the end of February–and your birthday–you were at least a little more comfortable with Sherlock. You didn't talk to him about Irene, since you were so busy that you hardly thought about her. Work was crushing down on you, adding to the stress of Irene Adler's invisible presence and the strain of your relationship with your fiancé. But at least work was a distraction, and by the time you returned home or to 221B, you were so tired that you didn't even have the energy to accuse him of anything.

You got the day off for your birthday, probably since your boss pitied you after you came into work half-dead for two weeks straight. You couldn't remember the last time you thought about Irene Adler, so there was no reason for her to be in your head now. Rather, you were entertaining yourself by being with Sherlock, happy and content being in regular conversation with him. He seemed at least more sensitive towards you, probably because you'd been a little cruel to him, and although you'd already apologized for it, he insisted upon not letting you around any stimuli that could bring up that unpleasant time with Irene Adler. You would think that he was trying to be *nice* to you, but–*his* version of "nice," which meant minimal comments about your habits. And he still seemed a bit distracted, but… But, he was always busy, and you knew that you'd be overreacting to assume that it had to do with a certain woman.

…no! Not today! You weren't going to think about it on your birthday!

After returning to 221B with groceries, you were practically squirming with anticipation at being together all day with Sherlock. All of your unhappy thoughts surrounding him had been unceremoniously dumped out, and you were filled with sappy, warm, and nostalgic joy at the thought of getting off work to spend a whole day with your fiancé. You were still thinking of a conversation you'd just had with him–about some poet's motives for killing a flock of sheep somewhere in Wales. You swore that it had something to do with his bastard child, but Sherlock insisted that there *was* no bastard child, and besides, the markings around his wrists clearly proved that he was breaking into the sheep pens to do something a bit more–"No, Sherlock, it's my birthday, I don't want to hear about that."

It felt good to be happy around him again, and every part of you felt relaxed. Perhaps this was a permanent return to normalcy–what you'd always wanted! It would be a nice birthday gift… *normal*… even if the "normal" between you and Sherlock was something that nobody else might want. Still…

You were holding Sherlock's hand, letting it swing idly between the two of you as he meandered over to his room. He seemed a bit bothered by something–perhaps something he hadn't expected to see–but whatever he was observing, you couldn't guess. He was checking a window, but you didn't notice. Your mind was elsewhere as you stared down the hallway to Sherlock's room. Perhaps without thinking, you took his hand in both of yours and pressed it with gentle force, to tell him that you wanted to make love. It had been an eternity since the last time you'd slept with him… it must have been early to mid-December. Too long! You were feeling affectionate and intimate, and you wanted him closer. He looked back at you and smiled faintly, knowing what you'd meant.

"One moment," he promised in a low voice. "Something's a bit off… Probably nothing."

You nodded and he continued on to his bedroom. You were looking back, thinking–well, John was still here, but it wasn't impossible to get him to leave. You thought that he had a new girlfriend by now, and he could go over to her place… Or he could go outside for just a few minutes and count all the yellow cars. Anything! Well, he did have premonition for these sorts of things… One time he'd caught you and Sherlock making eyes at each other across the room for a good ten minutes, and had gotten so fed up that he'd publicly announced his leaving, and he wasn't halfway down the stairs before hearing thudding on the walls. He could forgive you for just this time. It had been a long time since you and Sherlock had been together, he must have known it…

Sherlock was moving slowly towards his door, and you wondered what the matter was. The door was ajar, and only he recalled that it had been shut before he'd left to go to the shops. He opened the door and stepped inside, you coming in after, and–

John Watson was not in the hall at the time, so he did not hear–but he could see, and he practically *felt* it. You had separated yourself from Sherlock as quickly and vehemently as if you'd been burned, and were giving him a look. That look! He'd never seen something so horrible–not on *your* face, at least. John had plenty of scorned girlfriends to use as a catalogue, but you'd never had any resemblance to them until now.

"What is it? Sherlock…?"

John realized that Sherlock couldn't be seeing that look you were giving him–that terrible look of hurt, betrayal, and something dangerously close to *hatred*. And Sherlock didn't see it! The consulting detective was preoccupied with whatever was there in his room… If he had, he might have deduced the events of the coming months. Instead, he called back, "We have a client."

"What? In your bedroom?" He moved down the passage, past you, although putting his fingers against the wall next to you as if to tell you to stay instead of screaming hateful bloody murder and fleeing. Once he reached the bedroom, he saw the bed, and could only reply with, "Oh…"

Well… You couldn't call it a *marriage bed*… It would sooner be an estrangement bed! And whatever you named it, whatever you wanted to call it, Irene Adler was in it, sleeping peacefully with almost a smile on her face.

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# Chapter 38: Aprite un po' quegli occhi

**Author's Notes:** when i find myself in times of trouble
j. geils band comes to me
speaking words of wisdom
"love stinks"

~~also 15 reviews that last chapter can i just sing a romantic operatic aria in an anguished declaration of love to all of you~~

Upon seeing the arrival of Irene Adler, your first suggestion was to throw her out the window three or four times–to be fair. Unfortunately, your male companions disagreed… She had to be at 221B for a reason, after all. Not that *you* cared. You would sooner toss her out onto the streets, unceremonious and unmerciful, and let her fend for herself.

Instead, that woman was trotting around the flat like a new cat, making it known to everyone that she was the temporary owner of the place. You wanted to shoot her! She had chosen to dress in one of Sherlock's own robes, despite the fact that you'd chucked practically every one of John's robes at her instead. They would have fit better! But, no–she had to rub it in your face a little longer…

You had been about ready to go after her with an axe, but John pacified you with a cup of tea (*several* cups–you were on the warpath, after all) and a promise that he'd wrangle you up some opera tickets if you were good. And that was because he knew you weren't bluffing when you said that you could arrange her swift disappearance if need be… So instead you stewed in silence next to John as Sherlock sat across from Irene. Sherlock wasn't looking at you, but to be fair, you weren't looking at him either. All eyes were on Irene… The Woman important enough to absorb all the attention in the room.

She did look at you, occasionally–she gave you the once-over, except it was more than once. You wondered if she was checking you out, but you doubted it. She was probably just trying to rile you up… She must have known by then that she knew exactly how to push your buttons. Well, she *was* a professional button-pusher, although in different ways. And–

And you *fucking hated her*, now with a logical reason! Hearing about her reputation was one thing, but seeing her was quite another. You shouldn't have doubted that a professional, popular sex worker would be at least minimally attractive, but you didn't expect *her.* She was more than pretty, she was more than beautiful, she was gorgeous! She was a babe, and that was why you hated her. She was quite obviously everything that you weren't! She had a good figure, one that you could probably never attain… The face of a girl who got roses on her doorstep… But you could put up with all of that, if she were a brainless sex-bomb. But she wasn't! She was clever, she had already proven herself to be clever enough to outwit Sherlock Holmes himself, an achievement you'd never be able to replicate. So you did not resemble Irene Adler at all, and that was exactly why it frightened you that Sherlock Holmes was attracted to her. She was nothing like you–rather, *you* were nothing like *her.* So, then…

"So you faked your own death to get ahead of them," Sherlock was saying.

Irene shrugged. "It worked for a while."

"Except that you let John know that you were alive, and therefore me."

"I knew *you'd* keep my secret…"

"*You* couldn't."

"Um," you broke in, "I just want to throw it out there that John sort of put on his blog that you're alive. And it's been established that royalty reads his blog, so…"

Everyone looked at you, and you shrugged.

"I'm just *saying*, that wasn't a good… *evasive* maneuver." (You were proud of yourself! You felt logical)

There was a good deal of banter and you pushed back the curtains to stare out the window, feeling bored amidst all the out-clevering. You wanted to go home. Whatever awaited you at home was probably preferable to this place. Solitude! Yes, you wanted to be alone. You wanted to be alone! It would have been better if you had never accompanied Sherlock today at all… You should have stayed home… And if you were to go out, you shouldn't have gone to see him.

For a moment it seemed that Irene Adler was outwitted, and you glanced around, halfway interested in seeing the contents of "that fucking" phone. It would make you happy to see her just the least bit unhappy, well–you didn't feel too guilty over it! You were past feeling guilty over it! You did not have an advantage anymore… You didn't have the high ground, and you realized that you were no longer being cruel in your thoughts toward her. No… You were just being jealous, you were being properly cuckolded!

Of course, oh, of *course*, Irene Adler had the upper hand from the beginning. "I *told* you that camera phone was my life. I know when it's in my hand." Who cares! Anyone can do that. You could reach your hand around in your purse and know exactly what the back of your hand bumps into… You could grope around for a pen and know exactly which one you found without even having to look! That must be impressive too, a little. But–you weren't impressive. If meeting Irene Adler had taught you anything, it was that you weren't impressive in the least! You were ordinary, especially compared to her! That look Sherlock Holmes was giving her told you so!

"Oh," he said, "you're rather good."

Irene smiled. "You're not so bad."

You'd heard a term before, but you thought that it was indelicate, so you renamed it. And you were seeing it now, between the two of them… *Sight-shagging!* Wait, that didn't sound right. But it was true! What you were staring at was pure intensity, sex in the air! You were getting uncomfortable just watching it… Watching two people who *understood* each other lock eyes. They both got off on those games of wit, something you were out of shape for! It was like they were looking in a mirror… They knew each other, they were in tune!

*Equals!* The word came out of nowhere and slapped you in the face. You were looking at equals! They knew each other without ever having met. She was the only woman who'd ever beaten Sherlock Holmes, and he was the only man who'd presented somewhat of a challenge to her. There was no inequality between the two of them, and… the same couldn't be said for you and Sherlock! No! Just you there was enough to prove it. This was a matter of logic, and of course he wouldn't look to you for anything. He didn't need you for these sorts of matters, he never did! Why hadn't it bothered you before? Because you had been used to it, you had thought that it was *normal*! But it wasn't. There was something deeply terrible in the way you had accepted it… And you had accepted it because you thought that you could make up for it by loving him. You did love him, and that was the second part of the inequality! He was far more brilliant than you'd ever be, and… You loved him far more than he'd ever love you! That was the messy way that life moved!

Yes, well… That was fair. It was natural that you could pick up on life's little indecencies–you profiled criminals and collected their backgrounds, it was your job to pick out what was most unpleasant in people! So this was fair.

Sherlock and Irene hung in that space, afflicted as if they were in genius-heat, and John broke in: "Hamish. John *Hamish* Watson… Just if you were looking for baby names."

You smiled, just a bit, and resolved to take John out for a night drinking when this whole affair was over. Irene went on about some code she'd gotten from an MOD official and enticed Sherlock into decoding it.

"Out of curiosity," you wondered aloud, "do you ever actually get any of this information because you have some novel idea? Or the fact that you're a conversationalist? Because I'm pretty sure all of your excuses are that you knew what someone liked."

"Oh, come on, darling, we're both women…" She smiled at you for too long for you to feel comfortable. "Aren't we allowed to do as we please? Play with the big boys, whatever means necessary?"

You weren't in the mood for witty banter, so you settled with a graceful "Um, whatever." You were watching Sherlock now–watching to see if he really could solve that impossible code. He could do it, you knew it… He was brilliant, after all. What you didn't want to see was what was already happening… Irene Adler, leaning forward, leaning, leaning until she pressed a kiss to the side of your fiancé's face. It was a spot that you very frequently kissed. And she–she was there! She had muddied that one piece of territory that you considered sacred. Sherlock wasn't bothered by it, oh, but he was in the middle of thinking… He couldn't be bothered to notice!

Of course, he'd solved it, but you couldn't be bothered to care. Any other time, you would have been proud of him and would want to show him off around town. *See? He's Sherlock Holmes, he's brilliant, he's done so-and-so and on-and-on, did I mention he's my fiancé? He solved that decades-old case. I know who he is. I brought him off in the shower this morning and he said my name when he…* And so on. But now you were annoyed… Childishly so, you knew it, because you were only upset that he was doing it for *her*…

"I would have you, right here on this desk, until you begged for mercy twice." …well! He might as well take her up on that offer. Lord knows that he wouldn't be getting anything from *you* anytime soon.

It was fair! You had to admit that this was fair! The way they were looking at each other, you could feel the sex in the air. You were intruding. That was the way it went, you should have known… That was how operas went! The two gorgeous people in love, totally compatible, and there was an interloper keeping them apart… Like a shrill, useless fiancée! A fiancée getting in the way, feeling jealous, and everyone in the audience knew that she'd be out of the picture by the end of the first act… And to think, a month ago, you wouldn't considered yourself the interloper. You had thought yourself to be belonging with Sherlock Holmes, like you deserved to be with him… It seemed so naïve, in retrospect!

Hours passed, and your patience waned. You thought that you had least some right to be bitchy given the fact that your fiancé was being seduced in front of your very eyes and you couldn't do a damned thing about it, but now you just felt empty and upset. You wanted to go home to some comfort food and estrange yourself from Sherlock for a couple of days–just until you felt better. You'd been engaged to him such a long time that you didn't feel that it would be too bad if you had some alone time. There would be some days when the two of you were practically attached at the hip, and it probably annoyed him, anyway…

John went out, and you were alone with Sherlock and Irene. No, Irene was not alone with you and Sherlock by any means… Their names were coupled together, not yours… You were the interloper and you knew that you'd do well to remember it. She would not leave him alone, and neither would you, so invariably you ended up in the same room as Irene Adler, which left a rather unpleasant taste in your mouth.

Sherlock wasn't paying attention to anyone–par for the course–so Irene turned to you and smiled. "How's it like, then? Living with him."

"I don't live with him."

"But you will, won't you?" She glanced at your hand. "I see you're still engaged to him."

It took you a moment to reply, but you did say, "That's right."

Her smile was faint as she raised a brow. "And how's that going for you?"

"Very fine, thank you," you replied, your posture and words stiff, and you neglected to add *No thanks to you!* God! You felt like a schoolgirl, watching a bunch of prettier girls hovering around your boyfriend, and you were resorting to that teenage, snippy language.

"That's good to hear. Might I ask when the wedding is?"

*What do you care? You're not invited.* …Oh! Rather, "We haven't really decided yet."

"Oh? You don't say? And I thought you were engaged for a while…" She tilted her head and watched you carefully. "Has he really not thought about it yet?"

"He's very busy," you replied through gritted teeth. "We're not in a big rush or anything."

"If you say so, then." She didn't seem bothered by it, yet she must have known what she was implying–oh, you were hardly bothered! Stanford Stanley was already a professional at those little button-pushing tactics, and you'd had it with it all.

"If you ever change your mind," Irene went on, "I'm always here, you know…"

"Wh-What?!"

"You heard me… I think we'd have lots of fun." Her eyes trailed down to your ass, and you quickly turned around to face her. "You've got quite a classic figure… I like it. Nice eyes, too–like the girl in the photograph. You know how to find me, so… Just a thought."

You could only stand and stare at her. "…Wow!" Well, you could put your coat up on the rack and call it a night… There was no way that your day could get any weirder. Irene Adler had flirted with your fiancé and then turned around to flirt with you. But, God! Why hadn't she gone after John, then? Round the whole deal out? Whatever!

You were about to leave–you really did have to get home now, and although you could possibly stay another hour or so, you simply didn’t want to. Although you wanted Irene to leave the room for even one moment just so you could say something to Sherlock, if only a good-bye, she didn’t seem to notice… Nor should she, you guessed! You were the one that didn’t belong there, out of the two of them. You were not as clever as them, no, you were the drooling mess.

There, superimposed on the scene in front of you, was a familiar sight: Irene Adler close to Sherlock, leaning in closer and closer, to kiss him… but this horrible vision was worse! Sherlock was leaning in too, yes, he wanted to kiss her. He was hardly even thinking of you… He could see only the Woman in front of him, the only woman that really mattered. It would hardly be cheating; you couldn’t call it an affair… It was a... call it a consummation! You were in the way!

“Well, then…!” you remarked in a shaking voice, picking up your things. “I shouldn’t keep you waiting, then! I’d best be off!”

Irene was the one who returned your farewell. Sherlock still wasn’t paying any attention to you–he hadn’t been ever since he found Irene Adler! You were nothing. Practically a ghost… So it made no difference whether or not you said good-bye to him, or kissed him in a fond farewell, or pushed your fingers through his raven curls. So you did none of it! You left 221B at a brisk pace…!

Your steps weren’t ponderous or pensive as you fled down the stairs and out the door. No, you were light on your feet, quick, and your eyes glancing around in a watchful appetite. You were thinking, forming an idea. And ideas were dangerous, Sherlock said so many times himself. Well, wouldn’t he love to know that he was right…! What you were thinking now, what you were planning to do–it wouldn’t make you or Sherlock happy, but maybe it was the best for the both of you.

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# Chapter 39: Sola, sola in buio loco

**Author's Notes:** ~~over 5k wHAT HAPPENED~~

also on a scale of 1 to 10 how mad would you all be if i jokingly marked this as "complete"

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The whole affair ended quicker than you thought. Irene had been a manipulative bitch the whole time, to the surprise of seemingly everybody except you. You pitied no one in the scenario… you knew everything that had gone on. It wasn't like Mycroft Holmes to keep secrets, after all… He seemed to find it necessary that you knew everything.

You didn't know what was worse, honestly: being kept in the dark, as you had been for most of the scandal, or knowing everything that had gone on. Before, you had wanted to be the latter… now, the former! Now that you had known the intimacies of the whole event, you wanted to go back, because everything had changed and the change was–*not so nice*…

Sherlock didn't discuss the matter with you after it had finished, which you had anticipated. It made sense that he'd want to keep it from you. Men–*people*–often did! He had gone up against Irene Adler unexposed and paid for it… He didn't want you to know of his brief weaknesses. But you knew, as lovers know, as Dido had known about Aeneas's treachery and Penelope had known the face of her husband before he had returned to his familiar form. You knew, and you were almost insulted that Sherlock assumed that you didn't… how he tried to act like nothing had happened, how he shied away from even the mention of Irene Adler yet feigned ignorance on the subject. As if you didn't know that he and his armored heart had been stirred by Irene Adler much more passionately than you could ever hope to achieve. As if you didn't know that you were the lesser woman, but you could still have just a bit of power over him…

About a month after the Irene Adler affair, Sherlock disappeared without warning. Even though he had done little but upset you ever since December, you still worried yourself sick over him. It was in his nature to leave abruptly in order to go through with a case, he never left you in silence… Once he woke you up at four in the morning for a good-bye kiss because he assumed you'd get angry at him if he didn't. You made so many calls and lit so many fires under so many asses that half of London's officials must have third-degree burn marks on their bums. You were still protective over him–you wouldn't let anybody touch him… You would have torn down half of London to find him. You called John every hour on the hour for any updates on the matter, and…

And Sherlock reappeared several days later–healthy, nonchalant, and completely bewildered as to why you nearly burst into tears when you saw him. He shrugged and mentioned that he had business to attend to… business that must have popped out of absolutely nowhere. Once more he left you in the dark, not explaining to you or John where he was at or what he'd been doing. John mentioned that he'd seen a case file sitting on his desk a few days prior to the disappearance, and he thought that he must have trounced off to get business done by himself. You couldn't believe that it was true, but you had no other choice!

Two months after the return of Sherlock Holmes found John Watson pulling you to the side, telling you that he had urgent matters to talk to you about–matters that couldn't involve Sherlock.

"Listen, it's important," he said. "I just thought–you ought to know. Irene Adler is dead. She was killed by… I think it was, um, a terrorist cell?"

"Oh, God!" Once more you were sickened at the relief that spread through your stomach. Just what kind of human being were you? Could you ever *stop* being happy at the possibility of her demise? Well, no. "Does Sherlock know?"

"I told him that she's in America… He kept her phone. Might as well not throw him into another fit."

That was apparently the wrong answer, according to your body language. But you shrugged and said, "You're right. Can't have him crying about a woman. *The* woman."

"The only woman that matters." And then, he realized that he'd accidentally said it in front of you. "Um, I mean…"

"What?" You took the front of his jumper and shook him lightly–not violently, but forcefully all the same, that force of a shamed lover! "No, back up–the only woman that *matters*?"

John was growing a bit anxious at the way you were shaking him and was desperate for freedom. "*I* didn't say it, *Mycroft* did… That's *apparently* why Sherlock calls her *the* Woman… But you know how he is. It's a total exaggeration!"

You backed away, feeling a chill drift through your bloodstream that left you numb. Irene Adler–you knew she was important, but not *the most* important… Not *the most important* woman of all, especially to Sherlock Holmes.

Well, you should have seen it coming! She had been the only woman to beat Sherlock Holmes, and apparently that was important to him. It had garnered his respect! And you, you had never wanted to beat him. You would have lost; you would have thrown the whole game just so he could win! His victory was most important to you, and you cared about him first and foremost. But as for you, the fiancée…

Your mind was a horrid factory on your way to 221B a couple of days after the news about Irene. Your relationship with Sherlock had not yet finished declining, but you didn't yet have the motivation to do anything about it. You were no longer avoiding unpleasant thoughts–you were working with them actively, conspiratorially. At your core, you knew that Irene Adler couldn't possibly be dead. It simply wasn't in her nature to die, especially when such a thing would be convenient for you. She was horridly resilient, almost in spite of you. John had heard the news from Mycroft, a habitual liar who covered things up as a hobby–so you didn't trust that news too much. At that point, it wouldn't even surprise you if Mycroft didn't know the whole story. There may have been a cover-up that could fool a living cover-up, and you wondered just how clever such an event would have had to been if it fooled Mycroft Holmes. Yes, clever. And the one man who could fool Mycroft Holmes was…

You stopped–you actually stopped in your tracks. Oh, God! You were stupid, so embarrassingly stupid! You had barely thought of it all together, but upon examining it closely, it was all basic addition. Sherlock hadn't been on a case… Of course he had been in Islamabad, or wherever! He had wanted to save Irene Adler, oh, he had wanted to play the hero… *Heroes don't exist*, he had always told you, but apparently he left out the part about *but I can still go to foreign countries and save the damsel in distress*. And to think, that one time in Moscow–he had left you all alone with foreign gangsters beating down your flimsy motel door! You were his fiancée and he had left you… and he trounced off to who-knows-where for a woman who had thrived on exploiting him. That was why he hadn't told you anything… That was why he wouldn't explain himself. He knew of his guilt and he didn't care much about it. He still thought he could keep such things from you!

You and Sherlock were alone together at 221B, which seemed ideal, except neither of you was paying attention. Sherlock was staring out the window, and you were on your laptop, looking up holiday planning for Islamabad. Sherlock had probably noticed you coming in sans your usual spirit, but if he was curious as to why, he didn't ask. Once in a while you glanced at him, but… But it was so bad to think about! He had been despondent in the days following Irene Adler's death, refusing meals and composing music for her… Now he was in a pleasant mood, certainly with the knowledge that Irene Adler was thriving with his help. But why shouldn't he be proud…? It was quite a feat that he'd accomplished, slipping away to save the day and returning without suspicion. *You* should have been proud. But not with her! Any woman except the Woman!

No matter how much you tried to screw with the results, your laptop would not lie to you. Anyone going to and from Karachi would have taken far less time than Sherlock had been gone for. Even with the grace period of a couple of days, he had still been gone for too long of a time for the act to have been innocent. He had been gone *far* too long… No doubt stretching his schedule to spend some time with her before they'd be separated forever. But what did that sort of separation matter, if they had already consummated all they'd wanted? Oh, yes… A whirlwind affair, no doubt passionate and exotic and fulfilling, while the bland fiancée stayed at home, worrying herself sick. He had wanted to spend as much time with her as possible! Because he knew that, upon returning home, he'd be stuck with *you*…

You sighed and shut your laptop, entertaining yourself by watching Sherlock. He wasn't looking at you… He was looking out the window. He'd been in a quiet mood ever since he returned from his dabbling in Karachi. Longing, perhaps? Well–he'd surely had sex with Irene while with her for such a long time. What else do adults do? And, then, he'd come back to you, who had given him no love since December and would turn him away again. And to think you'd assumed that were good enough for him! Obviously not, not when a superior woman came into the fray… He had a woman to compare you with then, and you lost. Lost because you were so soft, so sentimental! Not impressive, not capable of taking one's breath away. Certainly not *his*. When had you ever impressed him? Never! You always had to run after him, you were always a step behind him! You thought that you could make up for it some way, you thought that no woman could possibly fill Sherlock Holmes's incredible ideal of a woman. But Irene Adler had! He knew that he didn't have to settle for *you*!

"Sherlock," you said, breaking the long silence, and Sherlock looked up distractedly at you.

"What is it?"

"Could I borrow your phone for a minute?"

"And what happened to your own?"

"I left it at my place," you lied flatly. "Please let me use yours."

He must have seen no reason to deny you, so he tossed his phone over. Before, you had been against going through his phone, but… Oh, those times! Back when you thought that the worst thing a lover could do was briefly snoop! Traveling to Pakistan to cheat on your fiancée in a whirlwind rescue mission-turned-sex fling was just a bit worse. So you didn't feel quite as guilty as you glanced through his text messages. And–

He'd kept them.

Your heart lurched back and forth as you looked through it. He'd kept every single one of Irene Adler's text messages–all of those flirtatious, sex-laced texts. Those were the only messages he'd ever saved! You felt like you'd be sick. The texts you thought must have irritated him were coveted. He'd kept them months and months after her leave… Like he wanted to treasure them! And you thought it so strange that *that* was your breaking point, but you couldn't help yourself!

With shaking hands you half-tossed, half-threw his phone back at him, mumbling thanks and looking down at your feet. You had thought that your mood could go no lower, but it seemed that life had busied with drilling a deeper *rock bottom* into your soul. At least you were caring enough to blame yourself first–you immediately criticized your own actions, wondering what you'd done wrong to create this massive distance between yourself and Sherlock. But then, it must have been your own fault for being born so *average*… Incompatibility; that was the problem. Sherlock Holmes had wanted an impressive lover, someone luminous and clever… You fulfilled none of those requirements! Irene Adler, as you'd already established, was superior… That was why she was *the* woman and you were *a* female. You had been unable to do anything to promote yourself in Sherlock's eyes. You had gotten too lazy, too comfortable, and in your lack of ambition, Sherlock had done what you were afraid he would: he'd gotten bored with you. Bored! Some men want affairs because they're bored, and this must be the case. He must have slept comfortably with Irene Adler, murmuring in the dim lamplight, plotting out ways to extend their brief stay together. He had been counting down the days until he was deprived of her! Deprived of her and forced to settle with less, with you… That was why he was forlorn around you! To think that you had assumed that his soul and yours had been forged in the same fire… And it seemed that, in the end, he and Irene Adler were soul mates. It was an insult to life to try to pass yourself off as his…

Sherlock had been watching you fidget and said, "You know, we…"

You glanced at him only briefly. "What?"

"If you'd like, we could…" He was looking away from you again. "Never mind."

You hadn't realized that you'd been–*leaking from your eyes*, only a little bit, and Sherlock leaned over to you. Reaching out, he said, "You're crying."

He was being genuinely considerate, which made you even more upset, and without meaning to you pushed him away from you. He froze up as soon as you did it, taking a moment to recover. You had never rejected him about anything aside from the occasional overboard experiment, and you hadn't realized that he'd been grateful for it. You had been warm and accepting to him for all of your relationship, and now that you had grown cold and prickly, he was unsure of how to proceed.

Your racing anger and frustration rushed to blame someone else, to point fingers, and naturally it settled on your fiancé sitting across the room. You had got what you wanted, your little bit of love from him, your *vogliatemi bene*. You had tried, you'd sweated like a pig for that ounce of affection from him, and then what? Irene Adler had swept into the room like someone late to the party, and had gotten him to fall most *ardently* and *desperately* in love with her. Infatuated and impressed, such a winning combination! You were left by the wayside, and it was because he couldn't keep his fucking head straight for two minutes! In the end, if Sherlock Holmes was anything, he was a man!

…well! Maybe it was all just you feeling sorry for yourself–and you wouldn't go through it anymore. You had been Icarus, and then had grown a bit too pissed off when you fell to the ground after knowing to not fly too close… You were on stilts, walking around giants, trying to pass yourself off as one! But you were no goddess, you were no genius, and you couldn't play with the big kids. But one thing consoled you–you were still a grown-up, and you could do what grown-ups do…

"It's quiet," Sherlock noted as the silence stretched on a bit longer. "Too boring."

"You don't have a case?"

"No."

"Hmm." You leaned back in the chair, crossing and uncrossing your legs. "Cheer up… Something exciting could turn up. A big row, for instance. I could say *fuck you, Sherlock*, and break up with you."

At this, Sherlock glanced over at you, alarmed. He was bothered by what you said and you knew it–he wasn't used to you being cruel when you were usually so amicable around him. And you were being cruel, but you couldn't help yourself. It was a bit fair! Just a bit!

"I'm not serious," you continued on after a silence that had, for him, lasted too long.

"Right," he replied, shifting uncomfortably in his seat while keeping an eye on you. It made you upset. Why did he only care about you when you talked about leaving him? …but at this point, maybe it was all right to make him squirm just a little more.

"I went down to the shops a few days ago–bumped into Irene and we talked a bit about this awful weather." You watched him out of the corner of your eye, watched him start at the name of Irene. "Irene Clarke, you know–the substance abuse counselor."

"…of course."

You let him settle for a moment before saying, "You know, John–told me something funny a while ago. He seems to think that Irene Adler is dead."

"Really?" Sherlock replied too quickly, keeping his voice even. "He told me she was in America."

"That's what he said he'd tell you, yes… But he seemed quite in a fluster about her being killed by some terrorists. But I don't think that's quite true–and how about you?"

He was very still–an animal trying to evade a predator by not moving a muscle. He said: "What are you trying to imply?"

"*Imply*?" You threw your hands up in the air. "I'm not implying anything, Sherlock, I'm *telling* you that I know you went off to Karachi to save Irene Adler… That was why you'd disappeared."

"I could have been anywhere, and you assume I was in the Middle East?"

The fact that he was attempting to uphold his deceit only made you more upset–it made you less forgiving. "Don't try to lie to me… You knew that she was in danger and you wouldn't let her die. Not her, you know… your equal."

Sherlock glared wordlessly at you for a moment–obviously torn between stating the obvious and lying to make you feel better. "I never presumed that we weren't equals."

"No!" You had a vehemence–a cruelty that surprised the both of you. "We are *not* equals… Fuck, we've never been. I was always watching your back, you know that? And that's how it was. I was always behind you–I could never catch up to you. You knew it, too… I was never good enough; I just thought I could pretend to be… But you knew I wasn't, and that's why you went to–go sleep with Irene Adler!"

Your voice was growing rougher and louder, whereas Sherlock's was lower and darker with every accusation. He was shaking a bit now, attempting to contain his frustration while you expressed yours clearly.

"I did," he said, "no such thing."

"You don't have to lie to me… It's been done now. You know, I thought I could take *some* consolation in the fact that there would have been no love in it, but… Obviously you care. You *care*!" You were laughing and hating yourself now, kneading your knuckles against your temples. "It's… It's all so stupid. I know what you'd said before. '*Love is a dangerous disadvantage… This is your heart and you should never let it rule your head.*' I thought that it could be fine, because it would mean that you'd never cheat on me. But, look! You ran off and… I mean, it's just so *stupid.* I couldn't compete. I was naïve! I wasn't even qualified to compete…"

You were moving around now, if only to expend your pent-up energy without harming him. You opened and closed cabinets at random, and in one of them you threw your engagement ring–if only you'd known that it had been the same drawer where he kept the phone of Irene Adler! The irony might have been too much. Sherlock had gotten up and was standing across from you, keeping a good distance between the two of you, watching every little movement you made. It made you even angrier. As if he needed a deduction for realizing that you were pissed off!

"I did not…" He stopped. "I would *not… sleep with her.*"

"Well, God, you didn't have to sleep with her if you didn't want to. You would have at least fucked her. Taken her out for a good old exotic shag." And what if there was a bastard child to deal with? It was better to think of these things before you changed rings…

Now he was raising his voice, and the noise that the both of you were making resounded through the lonely flat. "I did *not*. I would *not*. It's obvious that I wouldn't, and the fact that you're insisting upon this completely untrue conclusion is needlessly upsetting you further."

"Oh, fuck you… You can't make this sound sophisticated, you *can't!* How can I even believe you?! You tried to lie to me about going to Karachi–and now that I caught you in that, you want to lie again? How can I even trust you?" You were going mad, you were going stark-raving mad…

"There are some things that I can't tell you about. That had been established from the first days of our relationship… There was nothing noteworthy to tell you."

"Really? *Nothing*? How about those extra days you were in Karachi? You were only there *forever,* while I was going mad over here in London, trying to find you, but *you were on a case*… No, you were having some rich love affair with the only woman who matters to you! Oh, don't give me that look–she's the woman, *the* Woman. She must eclipse all of us other women, isn't that right? Better than all of us, and you're practically moonstruck over her. You know–when I first saw you together, it was like I was staring at someone looking in a mirror. You like her because she's apparently the best of all women–and you consider yourself the best among men. And you don't have to tell me that I'm inferior, because I *get* it…"

"Stop, stop!" He was growing fidgety under your barrage of accusations, and paced without pause on the other side of the room. "I did *not* sleep with her. Banish the thought from your mind entirely."

"Then enlighten me on what you *did* do, that whole time!"

"Escaping terrorists is a bit *complicated.* There was a change in plans for my return–there was a delay."

"I see. And so during this delay, you wouldn't have gone outside for fear of these terrorists coming after you. So what did you do, then? In the hotel, that hot hotel, with Irene Adler in heat right by you?"

"I…" He looked down, and at once he looked ashamed, refusing to finish. "I never considered you unimportant… I did not intend to deceive you, but it was counterproductive to let others know of a private mission."

"I'm not *others,* I'm your fiancée! Your future wife! Well–I *was.*"

That got Sherlock to stop dead in his tracks to look at you. "What did you...?"

"You can't even defend yourself, for Chrissakes… You can't deny anything I've said because it's *true*!" Your anger left you at once, only to be replaced with exhausted exasperation. "She's the most important woman to you."

"She is *not.*"

"You *tell* me that, but how can I believe it? Look–you already consider her to be *the* Woman. You were despondent when you thought she'd died and you were *impressed* when you realized that she'd deceived you. Then you were happy when she shows up in your bed, and you go out of your way to impress her back, which led to that whole governmental fuck-up that was solved only by your realization that she loved you, at least partly. So you go off without a single word and rescue her, sus*piciously* spending so fucking long with her that you scare the hell out of me, and yet you're somehow able to convince John that you were nowhere near Karachi at the time. So you do everything to hell and back for Irene Adler, who you *don't* consider incredibly important, and, meanwhile, you shove me in the path of every serial killer *you* want to talk to. Ah! I've got it–that's all I am. I'm your goddamn *guinea pig.* Not good enough to be your helper or assistant or whatever! I'm not smart, not like *her,* I'm not half as cunning! So you try to put me to good use. A-fucking-plus, Sherlock. I'm glad I'm so indispensable to you. Too dumb to argue with anything you said! I guess that's why you consider me *important.*"

You were getting crueler and–well, you didn't have to reiterate that you felt terrible over it! You wanted to stop yourself, you wanted to calm down before the whole situation went even further south. But you'd already admitted that you wanted to leave him, and there was no going back from something like that! That song you heard all the time–*the worst things in life come free to us.* It had sounded so stupid to you then, but now…!

Sherlock Holmes was, for once, at a disadvantage. He was poor at sentimentalism and anguished declarations of love. He cared little for them and had therefore never bothered to train himself in the craft. And now–now, you were leaving, growing more hateful and spiteful by the minute, and he had no way to quell you. For all of his quick thinking and eloquent speech, he was absolutely out of his element in the face of your rage. At a loss… And for the life of him he could find nothing to say to you, which you badly misinterpreted as inability to want to talk to you anymore.

"Fine then!" You spun around hectically, trying to find a good position. "Fine. That's it, then. I'm not going to give myself a heart attack. I can't make you love me anymore; I can't make you love her any less. That's the way life goes! Like an opera, oh, yes. The irony of it astounds me too, so you don't have to point it out."

You were gathering your things in a bristling rage. He was doing a nervous dance from foot to foot, watching you, unsure of what to do. "Where are you going?"

"Who cares?" you snapped, feeling unfair as soon as you said it. "Look–there's only so much that human beings can take, don't you agree? I think I could take more, because all I ever wanted was for you to be happy. And now–we've reached a critical point. I can't make you happy and all you've done since December is make me upset. So I think it's very simple now…"

"You can't!" he spat, vehement. "It… We're not doing things correctly."

"I'll just consult my textbook for domestic spats," you drawled as you backed away. "No, Sherlock… I think this is pretty plain. You love another woman, a superior sort of woman, and you might have slept with her. We've barely got along for months and we're unhappy, and–what, will you make me say it? For you, I was a walking and breathing *flaw.* I could never keep up with you, and I was never your equal… And that's the end of that. Better we get it all out and finished now, before messy business starts. It'd be–for the best."

"Of course it isn't."

"No?"

"It's not what I want, nor what you want," he replied simply, "so it is not for the best."

"It all hurts." You shook your head. "You could put a–positive spin on it, I suppose. You said yourself that love was a disadvantage. And now I'm letting you go and be as superior as you can."

"That was different… That was not the same…"

Well, it seemed fitting! In scientific matters he always spoke in phrases that went right over your head… And now, in matters of the soul, he was unable to say just what was on his mind. …but maybe it was better if you didn't hear it! You were trying to be a grown-up!

"I'm going," you said, trying to keep your voice was even as possible despite the fact that you would burst into tears the moment you were out of sight. "It'd be better to do it like this: very quick. I'll leave you alone. You know what that means, don't you?"

"Yes," he replied, his voice low once more. "You've lost your sentiment and you don't love me anymore."

But–no! It wasn't true, of course it wasn't. You hadn't loved someone before you'd loved him, and you loved him even as you left him. What you were doing was not out of hatred, but out of that corrupted love, angry love, and you wanted to hurt him because of it. You wanted to make him feel as if he'd been hurt, by you! Maybe that was the most effect you'd ever had on him.

"Wow!" was the most you could say. "Wow…"

Your departure was not quite as dramatic as you'd hoped. You'd stood still for a moment or two, perhaps hoping that Sherlock would summon up the proper vernacular to get you to stay, and after staring at him you'd bolted. You had lost your fight as soon as he had, and as soon as you left 221B, you wanted nothing more than to turn back around and go to him. You wanted to burst into tears so that he'd forgive you, and you forgive him, and you both could forget about it all… It was terrible, being grown-up! In your youth you had dreamed of these dramatic instances, because you thought that meant something so much more. But it was stupid and you hated the whole incident for even occurring… You even wanted to go back to Sherlock's flat and dig your engagement ring out of the drawer where you'd deposited it.

Yes! It was the worst thing in the world, to have to make such decisions… To be grown-up was the worst thing to have happened to you. Because now you were supposed to be happy with yourself–you were supposed to swish your hair a bit and cast a derisive glance over at your ex, proud to be independent and free-willed and strong enough to stand up to injustice. But you didn't want that sort of cruel independence, and you didn't want to pretend like you were blameless and that everything that had occurred was entirely Sherlock's fault. What you wanted was forgiveness and reconciliation… you wanted renewal and revitalization. And you had gone and cut him off entirely because you'd wanted to hurt him, if only for a moment. You'd thought that it would stir something deep within him and force him to admit his feelings for you. But you'd pushed him too far! You'd been unfair and you'd deliberately hit him where he was most vulnerable and underdeveloped. Maybe it was better that you'd left, then… Maybe it was better, even if you couldn't tell yourself that…

Crying would come later–crying would come when you were only three-quarters of the way back to your flat. For now, you could only leave. *You get nothing! You lose, good day, sir!* The scrape of wood-on-wood, the sound of shoes on cement: the door closed and you walked out of his life.

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## Chapter 40: Ah taci, ingiusto core

**Author's Notes:** i had to take a short break from >4k chapters jeSUS

also i had almost 40 reviews that last chapter
i've never gotten that much on a single chapter or oneshot ever
i'm gonna pin a medal on you all you all are just the best i don't even care if i get that many again i'm just so happy you all are reading and enjoying this i'm gonna cry

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It had been two weeks since you'd broken up with Sherlock Holmes, and you had no idea that two weeks could feel like such an impossible eternity. You'd been away from him for longer when he didn't take you along to Africa for a case, but that had been so, so different… Then, you had waited eagerly for his return, mentally accumulating the stories you could tell him upon his return. (And didn't he always listen to you!) Now, oh, now! Now you knew that he was somewhere in London, *loving his life in the rain* and so on, and you couldn't go to him or knock on his door. You couldn't even visit John without the crippling fear that Sherlock would be there, and you'd have to face this!

Did you regret breaking the engagement? Of course you fucking did… you regretted it minutes after it happened. But you were aware of your cruelty in the way you'd forced him into a corner and pushed him harder, and besides, you couldn't allow yourself a resolution when Irene Adler was still lurking around the edges of your mind whenever you talked to him. In that way, regretting decisions and thinking decisions were for the best fell into the same category… but you didn't have to like it!

You abused your phone regularly, but the day of the breakup you'd thrown it too hard against the bedpost, and it cracked: it died underneath your merciless hands. So in the weeks it took to repair, you missed all of Sherlock's ninety-seven text messages to you. If you had gotten them, the whole situation would have been reconciled much cleaner… Instead, he assumed that you were hell-bent on ignoring him, and he dove into a deep fit of despair.

John noticed it, of course–he was the only mutual friend between the two of you. He was utterly shocked at the state Sherlock had gotten into. He was rejecting meals, not sleeping, and refusing to go outside, which had been characteristic of the mourning for Irene Adler, but this time it was not quite the same. He even refused to take cases, rejecting all of them as soon as they came to him… John also noticed that he lost joy in all his former hobbies, such as tormenting passersby and forcing his *completely put-upon* flatmate to do his bidding. He wouldn't even touch his microscope and seemed to ignore anything even vaguely scientific, instead spending his time brooding and grumbling, staring at his phone for some reason.

"I haven't seen your lady around for a while," John noted, completely unaware of the magnitude of the events he'd missed. "Is she sick?"

"No."

"Busy, then?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, Sherlock, look at you! You're like a gloomy teenager." John shook his head, almost amused. "You and her have had a row, then?"

Sherlock was silent, so with a shrug John continued as he moved around the flat. "Happens to the best of us, I'm afraid. I can't go through a relationship without four or five of them, honestly… I'm surprised it took so long for you and her to have a proper one. Almost unnatural, you know? Something wrong with that."

"Then I don't like rows," Sherlock replied flatly.

"Have you tried to visit her? Get it all sorted out?"

Sherlock thought back to a couple of days ago, when he'd visited you a work during lunchtime when you'd been in your office. He'd knocked on your door, and from the other side he heard you call "Just a minute, please!" in a bright tone–as if you were so happy already! You were two steps from the door when he'd asked to please come in, that he'd like to talk to you, and then he could practically see you freeze mid-step. You'd cried at him to leave, to *go away*, and he asked again to come in *please*, he just wanted to see you, he needed to talk to you, and you kept yelling for him to go away, that you don't want to see him, and in order to preserve your reputation he had to flee–leaving you crying on the other side of the door!

He answered, "No."

"*One* of you has to, you know! That's how you get sorted through this."

Again Sherlock said, "I don't like rows."

"If you're going to get married, you should get used to it!" John remarked, not noticing his flatmate's wince at that *m* word. "Bickering comes with the territory. How to raise the kids, what to wear out, what to make for dinner…"

At the mention of domesticity Sherlock flattened back into a silent stewing, so John gave up. Sherlock Holmes was an impossible man, after all–it wasn't like he'd know what to do in such situations other than give up against the challenge. More experienced men have given up, too! So John departed and went to go visit you, wondering if you were a bit more accommodating.

You weren't! In fact, you were so like Sherlock in your despondency that John briefly wondered if you were trying to do an impression of him. You were equally uncommunicative, distant, and cranky, lapsing into long periods of silence when you didn't want to answer a question. You weren't depressed, exactly–neither of you were so dependent on a relationship that you'd resort to drastic measures–but you were both incredibly dour, preferring to sleep through the day. You two, too much like young people! You were both young anyway, true, but not *that* young… Not teenagers too stubborn to initiate a long conversation! Again, he didn't know the magnitude of the row, so he was amused by all of it.

"You don't want to talk to him about it?" John suggested as you briefly resurfaced from your dark mood.

"No!"

"*One of you has to*! Honestly, it's like you've never been in a relationship before."

You hid your hands so that he wouldn't notice your engagement ring missing. "Um, well… I never actually fought with any of my exes!"

"Seriously?"

You squirmed a bit, actually blushing. "None of them had lasted this long!"

"Oh, well, you're both smart… You can work it out…"

Ah, if only he knew! You and Sherlock were finished, and it seemed that the damage was irreparable. After all, you didn't know of his condition, and you didn't know the extent of his efforts to reconnect with you… so you assumed that he didn't care about it at all, that he was grateful for the opportunity to be rid of you! It threw you into a deeper despair, just as his mood worsened when he believed you to be consciously avoiding him at every turn.

As if you could completely avoid him! You were able to for the first week, only because you were frightened to have to deal with the situation again. But towards the middle of the second week, Coveney (who was no longer interested you, having smelled your availability) mentioned that Sherlock had practically been dragged to a suspicious crime scene, and without thinking you'd rushed right over to see him. It was… call it *muscle memory*! Force of habit! But, then again, you could have turned around at any point, but you didn't… You'd kept going until you were there, paying a cabbie to linger around the fringes of the crime scene as you peeked out the window to watch him. Oh, he just looked so *good* whenever he worked! So smart, so sharp, so effortless and cool… You had always known that you'd been lucky to have him, but then again, that thought was always paired with the realization that you had never deserved him! But it was fine to indulge yourself just then, to watch him with admiration, as you'd always done. You had never said that you didn't still love him! Rather, you reminded yourself of that fact whenever you thought of him!

Still, there was nothing to be done. You didn't want to feel any worse about your treatment to him, and you didn't want to have to deal with that old pain again. For the best… For the best… Except he was right, just like he was always right–it wasn't what you wanted at all, but you wouldn't change your resolve. You had to stay strong… He might hate you more if you came crawling back to him…

Trying to date again was out of the question: it had been too soon, and you needed some alone time before you went into that dangerous field again. You might need lots of time, too! You had never dated a man like Sherlock Holmes, and you were sure that you would never find a man quite like him. (And you weren't sure if that was good or bad!) You'd unconsciously compared him to every man you'd met afterwards, and the latter had always lost out, even while exceeding the former's capacity for emotion. It just wasn't fair that you'd met a superior sort of man… He was *too* brilliant and *too* fantastic! What an awful thing to go through…

You decided to take a vacation, just to get him off your mind. You were well within your rights! You were a grown-up! A grown-up with lots of money and a desire to relax for a week after regretting her own grown-up decisions. Unfortunately, your planning was cut short: you hadn't been anticipating the sudden and impolite disappearance of Sherlock Holmes from the face of England.

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# Chapter 41: O Mimì, tu più non torni

**Author's Notes:** sighs

you two

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It took you an embarrassingly short time to notice the absence of your former fiancé. It wasn't that you'd been following him or keeping track of him, but you were so in-tune with his schedule after almost a year of engagement that you naturally noticed anything amiss. Sherlock Holmes wasn't exactly a man to keep a diary, but after a while you could anticipate all of his daily plans (and, depending on the day and experiment, avoid them). And… Well, you were only ever half-avoiding him, as mentioned before. John had been forcing him outside to keep him from being a shut-in, so he returned to familiar haunts with a sour atmosphere. You knew where he often went, so it wasn't very hard to idly pass by such locations and take a quick glance at him. He never saw you, so you didn't see any real harm in it… Except, of course, for the fact that you were failing to cut Sherlock Holmes entirely out of your life, as you'd tried to do before.

In the middle of a week of these shady observations, Sherlock went missing. Such a predicament meant nothing to you, especially at the time, when you had no idea what Sherlock was working on for a case. Even when you were dating, he would frequently drop off the face of London for a week or two, telling you only where he planned on going and when he expected to back. But now that you were separated, you were rather startled by his absence, and, naturally, you wonder where he'd run off to. Unless he stayed in 221B all day and all week, you couldn't fathom where he'd be.

Naturally, you couldn't ask John… The poor man had been the go-between for you during the whole affair, and so far you'd been avoiding asking him about Sherlock's whereabouts in order to lessen suspicions that the two of you had broken up. (You weren't very sure why you were trying to hide it, but you were!) Still, you wanted to find *something* out. If you were going to take a quaint holiday, you wanted to relax, and therefore you had to have assurance that Sherlock hadn't been abducted by some crime lord. But how were you going to go about asking that? *Oh, I know Sherlock and I haven't spoken in weeks, but could you tell me where he's going, what he's doing, et cetera, et cetera? Not that I'm curious. What do you mean, 'ask him yourself'?*

Your problems would be solved once your phone was returned to you. It came back from repair with a warning for you to be a little gentler with it, and you hastily agreed. Since it had been in downtime, it hadn't received the messages Sherlock had sent you, so you had no reason to believe that they existed… All you had instead were the old ones he'd sent you, kept not out of girlish desire for memory-keeping but because you simply forgot to delete most of your text messages. (You still had texts from 2009 on there!)

On the third day of Sherlock's absence, John sent you a text: *Have you heard from Sherlock recently? —JW*

You frowned at it. Couldn't a man keep track of his own flatmate? Or was that supposed to be a sort of order to talk to Sherlock? *No. What is it?*

*That's a bit odd. He said he'd call you if everything went well. —JW*

You were puzzled, but to be fair, that would be abnormal behavior for Sherlock even when you two were at your happiest. *Why would he do that?*

*I'm not sure. Come over? -JW*

You obliged, coming out of your dark hovel of a flat to properly socialize. You decided to walk only because you needed some fresh air, and certainly not because you wanted to dawdle on your way there so that you didn't seem too desperate. On the way over, you decided to go through your texts and delete some… It'd be too embarrassing to keep messages from an ex in any situation, and it was absolutely humiliating to be seen as coveting some unaffectionate words from Sherlock Holmes.

To be fair, most of them weren't sentimental, since that wasn't his style: *I have a cow heart waiting for me at St. Bart's. Pick it up for me?* and *John lingers around the flat too much now. Find him a girlfriend* and the one-handed *caryng bdy opn dor stat*. But towards the middle, during your lower times with him, there was one message that caught your eye: *I saw you in the street today. You didn't see me.*

It had fit in with the theme of the rest of his texts to you (not incredibly substantial), but for some reason you lingered over it. It hadn't meant much to you at the time, but something had changed between the time you'd received it and now… There was something familiar in it the words that made you take pause, and you read it over and over again in some attempt to recall where you'd seen it before…

…oh! A single spark went through your memory, and you recalled an image… an image of a phone, yes… Irene Adler's phone! That had been one of the texts she had sent him, exactly… *I saw you in the street today. You didn't see me.* Then, why had he told *you* that? Clearly she'd been trying to flirt for him, so then…?

You went through more of the messages on your phone, curious now. Sure enough, another one he'd sent you read: *Even you have got to eat. Let's have dinner.* You remembered it–because of a long and difficult time at work, you hadn't eaten all day, which was a terrible record for you. After putting off seeing him because of stress, he finally managed to coerce you into getting food into your stomach, which improved your mood tenfold. The stress of the day made you forget that you'd first read it when Irene sent it to Sherlock...

Your first impulse was get angry. Had he seriously sent you, word-for-word, the texts that Irene had sent him? The woman who had caused the rift in your relationship? Was he just so insensitive that he thought that he could do something like that and get away with it? But then your anger subsided as you recalled your attempt at maturity–your repeated statement that you should *think of the whole situation, just don't think of yourself.* Because Sherlock Holmes never did anything without thinking it through; that was his strength and his weakness. So–why would he have done it?

It took only a few minutes of musing and mulling before guilt washed through you, turning your stomach over and making your knees wobbly. *He'd done it because of you!* You always liked to tease him because he didn't know how to flirt, how he would never be sentimental with you, how he was completely incompetent in soft, romantic matters. Such things weren't of great importance to you, and you thought that he'd known it… You thought that he would never *ever* be hung up on the thought that he'd disappointed you in some way in regards to your relationship. And you thought that he was completely and totally uninterested in pursuing a relationship of a normal standard.

Except it seemed that he did! That is, he cared what you thought of your relationship. You were wrong, completely wrong about that! He had taken your teasing seriously… He realized his shortcomings, and though he was not a man to make a drastic metamorphosis and become a romantic man, he believed that you were unfulfilled in some way. You weren't, really! You told him that you loved him often, at least, before Irene Adler…

…before Irene Adler, that was right! Before her, he must have seen absolutely nothing wrong in your relationship. He wouldn't have suspected anything, because you told him you loved him! And you had stopped as soon as Irene Adler had slithered in. So he would have tried to change something to fix the situation… he would have attempted to work on something you pointed out often, as in, his inability to dally with you. He wouldn't ask John for advice, and he didn't really have any other friends, so… he could only turn to a person whom he knew was practically a professional at nonchalant flirtation… and that woman was Irene Adler!

A heavy *oh* washed over you. It hadn't occurred to you that Sherlock could have saved her text messages for a reason other than misplaced sentiment. He'd done it in an attempt to study a textbook example and replicate it for private use. So you had gone through his text messages without context, and mistaken it for a sort of affair of the heart.

Swallowing sharply, you quickened your pace and hurried along. Although you'd walked with the intention of dawdling to 221B, you ended up arriving there faster than if you'd taken a cab.

"John?" you called out as soon as you'd entered, trying not to sound too desperate. "Where are you?"

He greeted you in the hallway. "Sorry to make you come over. It's a little difficult to explain over text."

"Par for the course, I guess. What's the matter?"

"Well… Sherlock's been difficult. Refused to take any cases for the last couple of weeks. A few days ago, though, he up and left for New York City. Said that he might as well do something in his spare time."

"Oh…" But what was surprising about that? He was always capricious. "So what's he there for?"

"Something easy, I guess. I don't think he was in the mood to strain himself. But he said he'd call you as soon as he was done, and I thought that was good, because you two have had quite the row… He said he'd be back by now. That's why I texted you."

Naturally, your pulse quickened at the thought of Sherlock in peril (an emotion that remained unchanged despite months upon months of his dangerous activity), and you nervously played with your hands while trying to keep your voice even–John would be suspicious if you sounded *too* nervous! "He went on a case all by himself? That's not like him… He always takes you along."

"He seemed insistent about it… Like a grumpy cat, you know how he is. Probably wanted an excuse to be by himself for a while." He frowned, thinking back. "Not like he'd been really communicative the last couple of weeks. But, and I don't mean offense, it's been sort of… *relaxing.* He usually goes on about you, you know, always talking about you."

"But he's always been…" You actually had to stop at that last bit. "What do you mean, *always talking about me*?"

"Only when you're gone… I mean, not like talking about you for hours as if you'd just started dating or anything. But he's one of those men who's ridiculously proud. *Today she almost nearly figured out the murderer before I did.* Or, *you know, the other day she opened a cabinet door to hit Anderson in the face.* And that time you proved that one officer wrong; that entertained him for days! I wouldn't totally say he's proud of you, I say he's *smug* to be associated with you."

John said that like it was a bad thing, of course, but you couldn't help but feel a little praised. You hadn't actually thought that you'd ever impressed him at all… If anything, you'd only managed to please him once or twice. And you'd thought that he was only impressed by Irene Adler, and that was why he'd spent so much time on her. But it looked like he had always found pleasure in things you did, those little things that other people wouldn't find important yet he enjoyed with almost gluttonous zeal… that was the way that lovers worked!

So you shouldn't have told him that you thought he didn't care about you… But what else could you do? He'd never told you and he had no intention of doing so. Maybe if you had, you wouldn't have treated him so hardly! Once more, guilt gnawed at your stomach, but if he was in New York City, then you couldn't just go rashly apologizing to him.

"So what's he doing in America, anyway?"

"I don't…" The cogs spun and John nodded. "Wait, that's right! Someone asked him to take care of an American. Normally he wouldn't care even if he got offered a lot of money, but I guessed he just… wanted to take a case?"

You still didn't know why he wanted to go alone… Even for boring cases, he and John were practically attached at the hip. "Who's the American?"

"Had an Italian name, I think… Sounded like a woman? That's right, Viola! Arcangelo Viola."

You had to laugh a little, albeit humorlessly. "That's funny! I thought you actually meant Arcangelo Viola."

"I, uh, did. Why, does that mean anything to you?"

"Of course! I'm in criminology…" Panic began to rise through your chest and you did a little anxious dance, tapping your feet. "You don't actually mean Arcangelo Viola, right? I guess he'd be bigger if you lived in New York. I think he's actually from New Jersey, but he moved. But yes, everybody who knows current criminals knows about him! He's awful. Runs a huge trafficking ring, drugs on the side like a hobby. What's Sherlock got to do with him?"

"I don't know! Someone came in a little while ago, some aspiring New York policeman, wanting his help in catching the man… He turned him down at first and then all of a sudden he had a total turn and wanted to do it."

"He can't do it by himself! Viola's dangerous!" you cried, pacing in a sort of rush, no longer concerned with appearing calm. Who were you kidding? If he was your fiancé, you'd already be on the plane over with a whole army behind you! "He's a cop-killer, everybody knows it! He's not going to take kindly to a British consulting detective on his heels. He'll have him executed!"

John most likely thought that you were panicking out of some sort of domestic protectiveness. "Have you ever *seen* Sherlock Holmes in danger?"

"*Yes*!"

"But he always knows how to get out of it!"

"He shouldn't be alone," you kept repeating. "He shouldn't be alone! He's so stupid; I hate him! A complete idiot!"

"I thought that you had the patience of a saint when with him," John remarked with reverence. "It's odd to know that you're here with the rest of us."

"Did he say where he was at in New York? Anywhere?"

"What does it matter?"

“Because I’m going!” you exclaimed, becoming more sure of yourself the more you went on. “I have to go, he can’t do this by himself…”

“I suppose that’s one way to make up…” John went through his messages. “He didn’t really say where he was, just… Actually, he left without saying anything about taking the case, so I didn’t know where he was for a bit. He said that he was in New York and I didn’t believe him, so I made him take a picture… Here it is.”

He showed you something, and with a jolt you took it and looked at it closely.

“What, you recognize it?” he asked.

“I went to New York just a couple of years ago… To the Metropolitan Opera House,” you explained quickly. “That’s it, over there! I remember it. He must be around there!”

“Maybe he was just in a cab?”

“He wouldn’t go anywhere unless he really needed to... He has to be around there *somewhere*!”

“I don’t *doubt* it…”

“Then I’ll just have to start there!” You had the urge to run back to your flat to pack your bags. You had only one objective on your mind: find Sherlock Holmes… At the very least you had to smack him around for trying to go off to find Arcangelo Viola without a huge backup squad!

You didn’t doubt that you still had to work things out with him… You needed to know what he was doing in his spare time while in Karachi, and you needed to know what he’d done with Irene Adler, what she meant to him. But you’d already been proven wrong, and you couldn’t bear to have your whole relationship fucked up permanently because of total misunderstandings. …well, that’s what happened, wasn’t it? So you had to fix it, because he wouldn’t! You could take responsible for accusing him of all those things!

John, utterly perturbed, wished you good luck, and you were off. You wrangled some last-minute tickets and did some wibbling and wobbling to get out of work for a few days. You had some important business to do, after all, and you wouldn’t let anything get in your way! You had an idiot not-fiancé and you had been an idiot fiancée! At the very least, you had to fix things before he–well–that is, he definitely wouldn’t die! Not if you had a say in it!

So you might have broken up from him because of an overwhelming urge to run away… but now, you had to be ready, because you were going to run straight at him.

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# Chapter 42: O buon Marcello, aiuto!

**Author's Notes:** to quote robot chicken "BACK FROM THE DEAD ASSHOLES"

to everyone who waited patiently, thank you !! i'm sorry it took so long, i was basically assreamed by work and college. this was longer than expected but sherlock's gonna be in the next chapter and then sO

to everyone who wants to run to the review section and bitch about the wait: sit down because om fg seriously ?? like i can understand being disappointed and i'm not going to tell you to not be disappointed or whatever but i don't get paid shit for this and i have a scholarship riding on my academic performance and this is not my priority even though writing is important to me

on a lesser note i want to marry grissom

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On principle, you loved America and Americans. They were your soul mates in terms of criminal interests–they provided the best serial killers, they used up all their TV timeslots on crime programming, and they always had a vague, nosy interest in crime so that you could chat just any old stranger up about a dangerous person and they'd be more than happy to continue the conversation. It was true that New York City wasn't the best representation of the country's manners (shopkeepers gave you funny looks if you dared to say "thank you, have a nice day"), but they were still Americans, and as long as you fumbled around with a map and strained your accent, they'd point you in the right direction. This was useful to you, since you would probably go around in circles at Times Square if it hadn't been for a little help…

After putting on a rather egregious Swedish accent to get some extra help, you managed to make it over to the Metropolitan Opera House. (Had you not been panicking ever since you'd stepped foot on the plane, you probably would have delayed your frantic rescue a bit and gone out to see a show) It made you a little grumpy to realize that the first thing Sherlock had taken note of to document his time in New York City was a house of opera, your steadfast passion–he wasn't fond of the art unless you were somehow involved, and you allowed yourself to be sentimental a minute and wonder if he'd thought of you as he looked at it. Still, it helped that he'd taken a picture of it… Sherlock wouldn't have dawdled around the city, so he must have been nearby at the time.

But where would he have gone to pursue Arcangelo Viola? The man could own every bribe-addled department in New York if he wanted to–the man wasn't exactly short on money. How were you supposed to know where he'd gone?

Well–that was why you had a note in your pocket. Sherlock Holmes might be a super-genius and good at everything, but if there was one thing you surpassed him at, it was that vaguely feminine need to take stock of everything that was in a room. …maybe it wasn't ordinary, true, but ever since you started dating him, you felt the need to make some sort of deduction wherever you went. But you weren't so brilliant that you could look at a man's pocket watch and deduce his wife's hair color, so you instead chose to go through belongings in a room until you got a good indication of who lived there. So, naturally, you had gone through the contents of 221B four or five times over, curiosity overwhelming your desire to not snoop through your fiancé's belongings.

Sherlock kept records here and there, most of which didn't interest you. (He told you about basically every one of his accomplishments, anyway) Once you'd stumbled upon a file that confused you–one you couldn't make sense of until you looked it over in his absence: a list of names, none of which you'd recognized. You thought that it was his address book or whatever (although you couldn't imagine him having *that* many friends) until you noticed that there were more than just phone numbers there–there were locations, appearances, and general information. A whole reference book, but for whom? After some prodding, John told you that Sherlock kept it to keep track of his associates (and cross off their names so he could remember which ones were killed, "being idiots").

…so he had a file full of his Homeless Network! You'd wondered why he'd felt the need to denote *lives under bridge, shabby coat, four weasels,* and so on. After the recent events, you'd taken the file along in your bag and pored over the contents on the flight over. It seemed that Sherlock's network extended past London… It looked like he knew people from Singapore, South Korea, *North* Korea, Belarus, and others. You searched for a contact in the United States to help you just in case you ended up in New York City and realized that dramatically rushing off to a foreign country didn't guarantee that you'd know what was going on. Luckily for you, he had associates in California, Florida, Michigan (who did he need to know in *Michigan*?), South Dakota (do people even *live* there?), and–New York! He had the most in New York City, probably since it bore a passing resemblance to London in terms of commotion.

Associates were scattered all over the city, but the one closest to the Opera House was someone by the name of *Grissom*, although you couldn't tell if it was a first or last name. Unhelpfully, Sherlock had been the most laconic in the entry: *Corner coffee shop window glasses pretentious screenplay laptop.* …Well, you didn't need *keywords* for this fucking thing! If Sherlock was still alive, you were going to dangle him over a bridge for half-assing something that he had no idea would be incredibly important to you…

At least, you hoped it was important! For all you knew, this Grissom was a one-time companion and didn't even remember Sherlock. But you had no other choice!

After a great deal of milling about around the surrounding streets and nearly getting hit by countless taxis (while it was *your turn to cross!*), you found yourself in front of a small and rather seedy-looking coffee shop that sat at a corner. You prayed to God that this was the right one–you'd been looking at all the Starbucks, but could find no one to match the description of Grissom. That left just this shop, then! …at least, you thought so! You didn't know how many of these goddamned places were around and you'd probably crossed in front of that place once or twice without noticing it.

You peeked through the glass, hoping that's what Sherlock had meant by *window.* Besides the barista, there was just one person in the whole place–a young man sitting by the window, typing at a laptop and occasionally adjusting his glasses from the side. If anything, he was an incredible hipster–the straight-out-of-college look with skinny jeans, the big retro glasses, a plaid shirt with an ironic t-shirt underneath and a scarf draped lazily over his shoulders. He was staring out the window intently and didn't even notice you come in… He didn't look like the sort of person Sherlock Holmes would work with, but you didn't care in the least: it had to be him!

You were so overjoyed that you nearly screamed and ran in there to make out with him. It was him, it was him! It couldn't possibly be anyone else! Now you just had to walk in there and *play it cool*… Be very enigmatic and mysterious, maybe slide him a note on a napkin, not look directly at him, be *discreet*…

…so you marched in there, went straight up to him, folded your arms and said, "Grissom?"

He probably would have pretended to not have heard you, but there were no customers besides the two of you and the whole shop was otherwise silent. Awkwardly he looked up at you once, then twice, not ceasing his typing for one moment. "Y-Yeah?"

So you were right! That made you slightly more confident. You still had a chance to be discreet, but in your excitement you were impatient. "I know you know Sherlock Holmes. Tell me where he is."

Now–you knew that there was a very likely chance that Sherlock worked with Grissom years ago, and the two hadn't seen each other since. But your desperation and growing anxiety over Sherlock's safety made you not give a damn. You'd shake down every two-bit criminal until you found out where he was at!

Grissom made no sign that he knew the name, and shook his head. "I d-don't know what you're talking about, miss."

"Don't *miss* me," you snapped, growing blustery at the resistance. You peered over at his laptop screen to see a screenplay written, and you fished out your note and showed him. "Here–I have it right here. *Grissom, corner coffee shop, window, glasses, pretentious, screenplay, laptop.* See? It's his handwriting…"

"Did he really call me *pretentious?* That *asshole*. I…" He trailed off, realizing his error, and pouted. "All right, all right, *fine*. Grissom, James Grissom. So who are you?"

"I need you to help me," although you made it seem how it was–a command and not a request. "You've seen Sherlock today or recently, right?"

Grissom bristled–not out of dislike for you, most likely. If he really did work with Sherlock Holmes, then he wouldn't be quick to give out such information left and right. "What's it matter to you?"

"Oh, it *matters* to me. Just tell me!"

He was steadfast. "*Who* are *you*?"

"I'm his…" What was the proper term? What was right? "…fiancée! I'm his fiancée."

He broke his observation of the street and looked you over with a single glance, still typing at an incredible rate. "I don't see a ring on your finger."

Well, fuck! It was your own fault for not remembering to take it back… Even though you hadn't been planning on getting back together with him, not with so many questions still on your mind… But, still! Nobody else had noticed your lack of a ring… You'd worn it for so long that people saw it there even when it wasn't. Quick, what was a good lie?! "I gained weight. We had to get it resized."

"Oh." Grissom relaxed a bit and you had to hide your outraged offense. "He did mention a fiancée, but he didn't say her name or whatever. How do I know you're her?"

"I've never used 'twat' as an adjective until I'd met him."

"So it *is* you!" He nodded wisely. "All right; I believe it. He didn't say anything bad about you, don't worry. I guess I should have seen it coming… You don't exactly look like an undercover cop or a criminal or whatever."

"Hey!"

"Yeah, I did work with him once or twice," Grissom went on with a shrug, hitting "enter" a few times as he stared out the window. "But that's it. I haven't seen him in months. And I'll have you know that we were hardly associates or whatever. The first time, he just needed to use my laptop, and the second time he needed someone to practice his New York accent on."

"What, that's it?"

"Basically, yeah."

Despair washed over you as you realized that Grissom wasn't helpful in the least. Then why had Sherlock put him in as a reference if he was totally useless? Why did you have to come so far and get so close and just *fail*? Now you knew why you thought you weren't good enough for him… You weren't! Not nearly smart enough. Had the situation been reversed, Sherlock would have never needed help, and… Wait…

"Just wait!" you cried out, sure of yourself. "That's bullshit; I don't believe you for a minute."

"What? What?"

"Your screenplay!" you noted, jabbing a finger at it. "When I looked at it the first time, you wrote about that Henderson character making a pun about a serial killer at the Postal Service office. You haven't stopped typing until then, but you haven't added a damn word to it."

"S-So?"

"When I first saw you," you went on, hoping that you weren't just pulling facts out of your ass for no reason, "you were staring out the window. Pretty normal for a writer, right? But I *saw* you. You only typed when you saw people passing on the street. When it was empty, you stopped and switched tabs. Now there have been people walking up and down and you can hardly keep your eyes on me with how much you're staring out the window."

"So what?" Grissom demanded, bristling. "That doesn't mean a damned thing."

"But I think it *does.* You're what, twenty-five? Twenty-six? That's around the age range for everyone else under his New York City section. I went to you because you're closest to the opera house where he took the picture, but there's one other name he's written down… And if I recall correctly, it's *Morrison pickpocket in the alley.* Down *this* street! And I think it's more than a little coincidence that after *months* of Sherlock associating with you, you haven't moved your location at all, and you're right down from a pick-pocket. Now, tell me, how are you connected?"

Truth be told, you had no idea where you were going with any of it. It was probably actually all coincidence, but to your credit you said it all with such confidence that you could have persuaded anyone over it. The silence was incredibly tense as Grissom put his full attention on you, but you didn't waver for a second–you kept that appearance of knowing everything! And…

"Fine!" Grissom broke the silence after a very long time. "Fine, you caught me. Morrison pickpockets…" He lowered his voice to a harsh whisper. "Morrison hides in the alleyway or loops around the block and waits for me to message him." He opened another window, one you hadn't seen, where he was messaging his partner. "I describe everyone who walks down the street, tell him if a cop's coming, and recommend who to pickpocket. He makes the final call. We've made thousands in a day with this."

"That's pretty brilliant." You smiled. "I can see why Sherlock would work with you."

Grissom smirked and shook his head ruefully. “I didn’t *want* to work with him. Total bastard, right? I thought he looked rich when we first met so I told Morrison to go after him. Holmes saw him coming and let him steal his wallet only so he could follow him back to me. When he got us both together he wasn’t really mad… He said he wanted us to work with him, and he said he would pay us if he ever asked, so we agreed. The first time, he had us pickpocket some huge criminal for a package and Morrison nearly shit himself in the street.”

Well, good to know that Sherlock was always skilled in networking. “So was he here lately? Did he come and see you in the last few days, maybe?”

Grissom nodded. “Said he had some case to get through. Violet or Violent or somebody, I can’t remember. He said he needed me on the lookout for some guy who wore a certain sort of cufflinks–they were, like, rubies or something. He thought they were tacky. Eventually I found a couple of guys who had them and he went after them.”

The fact that he most likely went after some subordinates of Viola made you wince. Of course he’d gone headlong into that case! What if they’d killed him already for trying to follow them? “Do you know where he went?”

“Yeah, Morrison went along with him…”

“Then take me to him!”

You pushily brought him out of the coffee shop and had him lead you over to Morrison, who gave him directions, and Grissom begrudgingly took you over to the hotel that Morrison had described.

“How did you know it’d be around here, anyway?” Grissom asked, curious, as you walked together. “There are a lot of hotels in this city.”

“I’ve noticed… I tried to narrow it down. Walking distance from the Metropolitan Opera House where he took a picture. I didn’t think that Sherlock would go too far if he had work to do.”

For the first time, Grissom actually smiled. “You know, I can see why he’d hang around with you.”

“And why’s that?”

“He’s an asshole and you aren’t. I guess it’s a sort of equilibrium.”

“He’s not an asshole!” you whined. Then, “Well, he is. But not *all* the time.”

“I guess that’d be too tiring.” He shrugged. “He did talk about you, like I said. More or less mentioning you. Saying you’d like something he saw in the window, or that you’d get hit by a taxi if you ever tried to cross the street.”

“Pfft! I, uh, wouldn’t do that.” Still, you got a little warm on the insides from the confirmation that he did think about you in a way other than a disappointed recollection. “He’s a good man even if he can’t go a day without pointing out someone’s flaws. I like him.”

“That’s good, seeing as you’re engaged and all.”

You said, “Definitely,” and realized that you’d meant it as soon as you’d said it. …but there was nothing to be done now! You could only wait it out and hope.

You finally reached the hotel, and you immediately noticed two well-dressed gentlemen standing outside it, having a smoke. Grissom immediately jabbed a fist into your side to warn you, and you grumbled in response and continued staring at them.

“Those are the guys?”

“They might be. They all dress the same, anyway.”

“Ruby cufflinks, right?”

“Ruby cufflinks. But why–”

You were so close to Sherlock that you could feel it. To fall within spitting distance of a couple of violent, murderous thugs was practically child’s play to you. So you did, dropping your phone on purpose so that you could bend down right next to them. Right next to them, within distance of them being able to crush your head open. But they didn’t, and they didn’t seem to notice you inconspicuously glancing at their cufflinks. As soon as you saw what you needed, you went to catch up with Grissom, so excited that you could barely speak.

“Yes! Yes! Rubies. They’re definitely still in this hotel.” You paused, feeling as if you’d forgotten to ask someone. “Grissom, how long ago did Sherlock go to confront Arcangelo Viola?”

“Um… Well… It must have been about a day ago.”

A day! A day was too long! A day was too many hours to account for! Your excitement was turning into sheer panic. What would a crime lord keep a consulting detective around for? What if he’d been killed already? Oh, God! You had to hurry!

“I’m going in.”

“Going *in*?” Grissom cried, alarm. “You can’t do that. They’ll kill you.”

“Wow! I’m not exactly going to walk up like, ‘hey! I’m here for my fiancée. Prepare to die, etcetera, etcetera.’ I’ll be discreet.” …like last time.

He was uneasy. “Are you sure you’ll be all right? Why don’t you get a kind of policeman?”

“Even more discreet, great. I’m not interested in Viola at all, really. I’m here for Sherlock.”

“That was your mistake, but hey, it’s your British life.” He shrugged, but smiled again. “I’m not going to be the one to stop you. Hey–good luck! If I don’t hear back from you soon, I’ll get a whole goddamn S.W.A.T. team in the place. I mean it.”

“Thank you!” you replied earnestly. “It means a lot, really. I’ll have to tell Sherlock to pay you double whatever he did to have you get him here.”

Grissom paused for a moment. “He… Wait a minute. That bastard didn’t pay me anything!”

“Uh, well, *bye*.”

“I told you, I like you better than Sherlock. If you’re ever in town again, you come by–all right?”

“Of course,” you said, *if I make it out of here without getting my kneecaps busted.*

You parted, him with ease and you with incredible anxiety. You were still determined to get to Sherlock, sure, but it didn’t stop you from being so afraid that your knees were beginning to wobble. You were well within reason, too… This journey could easily be the end of your life, or his. His! Your heart was jerked around at the thought of him already dead–dead, and you hadn’t been able to tell him how you really felt! He would have died thinking that you hated him… You wouldn’t even have the opportunity to push him around and ask what had really happened between him and Irene!

That resolve was the only thing that kept you from fleeing the hotel. It was a very swanky place, completely upper-crust, and you were already receiving glares for your average attire. You hardly noticed, true–you were too afraid to feel offended. You had never been this close to Sherlock since arriving in New York City, but you still felt miles away… Just how could you get into the room with him? Dress up like a maid? Pretend to be room service? You couldn’t find a conclusion that didn’t end with you getting shot through the door. Desperation was creeping up on you, and against your will, hot tears began to spring up in your eyes. You had never been in this position before… You’d never seen Sherlock not be able to save himself with relative ease. You just wanted this all to be over! You’d forgive him for anything if he could just be safe!

*Think*, you commanded yourself, *think.* It was what Sherlock would want you to do! You’d never see him panic in any situation, at least, none that you could remember. Getting freaked out wasn’t going to save him at all! You had to be cautious, and you had to be wary… You had to keep a level head! And you could do it for him! The first step was to look, or as Sherlock said, *observe*. So who could you observe? High-class white people milling around, offering each other insincere laughs and taking water from tumbler glasses. There must be more, *more*! Women in power suits, the group of noisy teenagers who had to be escorted out. But more! Arcangelo Viola was in the hotel somewhere, and that had to be fascinating, somehow…

A high-pitched giggle and the click of plastic heels made you whip your head around. A little ways away was a group of women, but–none of them belonged! They were dressed a little unprofessionally, cocktail dresses or those towel-garments that ended right under the curve of their ass. They were all stunning, completely gorgeous, more like call girls than prostitutes, although they were most likely the latter. Probably new, too, with the way that some of them wobbled precariously in those five-inch heels! They approached the front desk in a herd, and the effeminate concierge handed them a key card and they all went off with more conspiratorial giggles.

To assume that they were related to Viola was an utter grasp at straws–with a place like this, any wealthy businessman would give up a month’s salary for a roll in the sheets, and any decent call girl will make sure that cameras were set up in the room. They could have been going anywhere! You hesitated until they were in the elevator, but the sudden thought of Sherlock being battered and bruised reinforced your resolve and you went up to the front desk with an utterly blustering swagger.

“Hello,” you greeted with your best (???) American accent, “we need to talk.”

The effeminate concierge, clearly believing you weren’t worth his time, pretended to not hear you for a minute until you rapped your nails impatiently on the desk, and then he looked up with disinterest.

“Can I help you?”

“Those girls,” you shot, “those *bitches*. Where did they go? Did they go to Viola’s room, like I asked?”

He glared. “And who the hell are *you*?”

“I’m…” Oh, shit! Who could you be? *Who could you be?!* “I’m their pimp.”

“*What*?!” He gave you an up-and-down look. “You don’t exactly come off as one, honey.”

“They’re a bunch of new bitches! Can’t walk in heels!” you went on, talking fast. “They all run of giggling like a bunch of dumb broads, not knowing what to do. I have to tell Sex Kitten–that was the redhead–that this isn’t Germany anymore and she can’t pull any more of that scat porn bullshit. Are you *listening*?”

You had no idea what you were even saying, but you were getting the concierge a little shaken–he wasn’t sure if he should call security or give in. “They d-didn’t mention you!”

“That’s because they’re new!”

“Look, I can’t…” He dropped his voice. “I can’t give you room numbers right now.”

“Why not?”

“Viola’s not just *anyone*!”

“How much did he pay you to keep quiet? I’ll double it!”

“I don’t–”

You took out what you had in your wallet–a few twenty pound notes–and slapped them on the front desk. “Viola’s room. *Now.*”

He picked the currency up with some distaste. “What the hell is *this*?”

“It’s… *money*!”

“Not American, sweetie.”

“Just put it through an exchange machine or something!” you cried, exasperated, and as soon as you dropped your accent he looked up with alarm.

Attempting not to panic, you improvised. “All right, no more Mr. Nice Guy, motherfucker,” you hissed through your teeth, pulling back your jacket to reveal the gun that you kept–and the one you were pretty sure you couldn’t just carry around, so you improvised for that too. You whipped out a badge that Lestrade let you borrow once for some reason and flashed it in his face. “Interpol. Now give me that room number or I’m going to have you arrested for obstruction of justice.”

You really didn’t have any fucking idea what you were saying or if it would work. But you were damned lucky that the concierge was young, or else he probably would have hit you in the face and made you leave… But you’d gotten him so shaken that he hastily flashed a room number at you from a clipboard he had in front of him.

“I’ll take the room card from the next room over,” you blustered, just so that you could have an opportunity to figure out what was going on. You received it and practically sprinted to the elevators, success coursing through you as you hurried to your room. You were close to Sherlock! You were so close to Sherlock… But now, what could you do? You would have to figure it out!

You couldn’t knock on the door, that was for sure… No way for you to figure out what was going on like that. You pressed an ear to the wall and heard talking, but even when you strained your ears, you couldn’t pick out the familiar sarcastic baritone of your ex-fiancé among the muffled conversation. Frustrated, you kicked things around your room, trying to figure out what you could do to check. It looked like Viola had checked out only one room, so you could be sure that, if Sherlock was anywhere here, he’d be in there… And, if not, you’d shoot out every lock until you found him. But you had to put your faith into that next room over.

What could you do? What could you do? Call the next room and ask to *please speak with the British asshole who may be there?* Drill a hole through the wall? Start shooting and pray that you hit something good?

…or…

You had been staring at the window for quite some time, but you had considered it to be more or less aesthetic. In your desperation, though, you realized the utility of such a thing. Windows! You loved windows and you always had… What are windows good for? *Windows can be used to see outside.* No, besides that! They could be used to see inside… You could see what was going on in the other room, and you could evaluate the situation!

You ran over to it and opened it up. There was a screen that you had to break in order to open it up all the way, and when you broke it, it fell all the way down, and then you realized the dizzying height you were at. But you pushed it to the very back of your mind, because for one dazzling moment, your safety wasn’t the biggest thing on your mind. There was someone you loved and he could be in the next room over, and he needed your help!

You tested the ledge–you did all sorts of fucking tests with weight and measurement, and found out that it was actually quite generous in terms of structure. Most likely, it was reinforced so that someone threatening suicide wouldn’t have their demise unhappily hurried by a faulty design… Or maybe it was made so that some sort of lovey couple could go out and sit on it! You hoped not… Your palms were getting sweaty just looking at it.

…but… No! Once more, you were struck by the urgency that pressed against your mind. You had no options left but to risk your life for someone who was a complete idiot despite his brilliancy. And you were… You were going to do that for him! Because there was still unfinished business with him, and you weren’t going to let him get away with dying when there was still so much to talk about! You hadn’t talked about Irene or Karachi! You hadn’t talked about whether or not he actually loved you! You hadn’t talked about who you wanted to invite to your wedding, or what he thought about wars overseas, or whether or not he ever liked his mother’s cooking… Things like that…

In fact, things like that–little but important matters, those tidbits of life that you had overlooked and taken for granted for so long–were the exact things that drove you to make several prayers to various religions and wipe your sweaty palms on your skirt. It was time to go and you stepped out on the ledge.

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# Chapter 43: Crudel, perché finora

**Author's Notes:** "don't worry, i'll never write a chapter as long as 5k again lol" 6k later

and we know what's coming next (it's the sex)

also *benedict cumberbatch groomsman outfit season 3*

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Surprisingly, you found the ledge to be even more generous than you'd first thought. Not only was there plenty of room to stand, there was actually enough room for you to lie down and roll around a bit; not that you wanted to… Your palms were sweaty enough, not that anyone could blame you with you being a dizzying distance up in the air. Luckily, there were some gaudy masonry cuts to the side of the hotel for decorative purposes, and when you clung to them for balance you found that you could cross the ledge with no real effort.

Sidling over and hugging the wall to avoid the wind, you tried to peer into the next room over as inconspicuously as possible. You had no idea how well the men would be able to see out the window, and you didn't really like the idea of moving in just for someone to shoot you onto the pavement! So you moved carefully, inch by inch, until you could get half of an eyeful into the next room over.

Had you not been standing on a ledge, your knees would have collapsed under you with relief at seeing that Sherlock was all right. He had his back to you, seated on a chair with his hands cuffed behind his back, and from what you could tell he didn't look overly battered. He was alive! And that was a relief… Nothing would have stopped you from finding a grenade and throwing it in there, had you found him killed!

With a sigh, you forced yourself a little farther over and looked around the rest of the room. Viola had three men with him, and you tried to look on the bright side by thinking, *oh, there could be more!* They had him surrounded and would probably be the ones to kill you if you made your presence known. You watched them a little longer despite the ludicrous freezing you were suffering due to being at the height. Although you couldn't hear what was going on, you saw them pause to hear Sherlock speak before appearing even more pissed-off. That little asshole! He was a hostage, tied-up, his client probably dead, and he couldn't stop being an asshole for five minutes…

With one hand you halfheartedly tried to lift the window so that you could hear what they were talking about, but after the application of actual effort, you found that the windows were closed from the inside… You guessed that they locked automatically when shut, and in a panic you turned to see your own window beginning to slide down. Of course you had the fucking *broken* window! Hurriedly you scooted over and slid back into your own room, taking a few moments to roll on the floor with relaxation at being totally safe.

Now that you had seen Sherlock and knew him to be safe, you were struck by the utter desperation to see him again. The urgency you'd felt when first boarding a flight to America had been renewed, and you simply couldn't quit now that you were so incredibly close to him. But what could you do? What could you do? You weren't an ultra-badass who could go in guns blazing and save the day, although you often wished that you were. That terrible feeling of not being able to defend someone you love crept over you, and drove you to a strong and almost masculine motivation to go in and save him. But you had to get rid of those underlings first… But how?

You pressed an ear to the adjacent wall and once more tried to make out the conversation. You still couldn't hear anything, but you heard that the argument had gotten a bit louder. What if you were running out of time?! Panic gripped your breast and you knew that you'd have to think of something quick. All right, *think*. What did you have with you? A handgun. All right, that was useful, but you couldn't exactly go around firing it at your leisure. A scarf. At the very end, at least you could try to strangle someone. A keychain. You hardly remembered what was on it! Frustration was making tears well up in your eyes as you felt the beginnings of failure, that you were failing *him*. You usually asked him what he'd do in these situations, but now that wasn't an option… *You* had to think of something to do!

You exited your room, hovering outside of Viola's. You tried to work yourself up for it… You'd gotten that far, you'd been brilliant enough to get to Sherlock Holmes on little more than scraps of evidence. What could you do? What strengths did you have, what opportunities did you have?

…well… You *did* have a very bad temper when it came to your fiancé being injured… And you had self-defense training. It looked like that's all you had to work with!

Almost without thinking, you started to knock on the door to Viola's room, and you heard silence fall inside. *But what were you going to say?!* You hadn't thought about it! So you no choice but to make something up…!

"Cleaning room!" you shrieked, your voice two pitches higher than normal, your accent on a delicate balance between Irish and Croatian. "Clean room? Cleaning room!" Was it racist? You weren't sure. Did America still have illegal immigrants for maids?

You heard an order being barked out, and you backed away from the door so that when it was opened, he could see nothing but an empty hallway.

"There's no one there," the underling reported back, the door still open.

"Then make sure no one else *comes!*"

The guard stepped out into the hallway, not yet noticing you crouching in the corner. One, two, three–the door clicked shut and locked.

He was armed, but he was prepared for some scrawny foreign maid and unprepared for a wily bitch with a threatened lover. You knew nothing of "rules" and "honor codes," so when you punched him with your keychain… that was in the shape of a *kitten*… you hit him right in his man-platter. And you supposed that hitting someone with a keychain in the shape of a cat would be less than stellar, except as soon as you saw it you recalled that Sherlock had given it to you special for a six-month anniversary, and it was a self-defense keychain. So when you him right in his most precious bits, it was with two blades as sharp as knives, and even you winced a little when you made contact.

I don't blame him that he was going to scream bloody murder while in that indescribable pain, but you jammed your scarf down in his throat (deciding that you could just knit another one) and kicked him right where his fresh wound was at. He went down as if he had glass bones, falling at your feet as you surveyed your keychain.

"I think that's banned here, too," you noted, and then recalled your brutality (which shocked even you!) and dragged your half-conscious victim a little way down the hallway, trying to figure out where to dispose of the body. You could put him in your own room, but then what? It wouldn't be hard for him to pull himself together and storm right back in while you were continuing your mission… So you saw a large silver chute and opened it up, recognizing that it was for laundry, and you recalled that people in films used laundry chutes all the time. With a gargantuan amount of effort you threw the man down the shaft.

You had already put him in there and had turned away when you remembered reading some article about people dying by falling down laundry chutes, and you said, "Whoops!" But there was no time to worry over that, or the fact that you were now practically a walking illegal weapon. You had to continue!

You returned to the door and waited for a few minutes, wondering if you should knock again. What if Viola brought out both of his other men at once, suspicious at their partner's absence? You'd never be able to take two on at once! So then what? Start screaming like your water just broke? So many decisions…

A burst of stupid insight flashed through your mind, and you returned to your room and began to rummage around. You had no luggage with you, but you could still perfectly well use the weapons that were in your room… You cracked your door open so that the sound would be able to flood through, and you turned on your TV and went to the music channel to play it on full-blast. (And it sounded awful! You wished that you had your opera with you!)

There were a few endings to that plan, so you prepared for all of them by hiding underneath the hotel bed with a decorative vase. If they called security, then you'd have to make a run for it… If they shot through the wall for irritating Viola, then you'd have cover… But if Viola, unable to hear his own thoughts, yelled at one of his underlings to *turn that fucking shit off* as well as *find wherever the fuck Thompson went, make sure he's not fucking that maid*, as he was doing *right now*, then you'd succeed.

You heard the heavy footsteps of a man's approach as well as the slam of the door as he opened it, and as he busied himself with callously shooting the TV, you crept out from underneath the bed and whacked him over the head with the vase and watched him fall to the floor.

"Not my manliest plan ever," you admitted to no one in particular, "but it worked!"

You paused for a few frantic seconds, wondering if Viola had heard the commotion, but there was silence as he evidently prepared for the man's return. Hurriedly you put the man on the rolling chair and rolled him out into the hall to dispose of him down the laundry chute. (This time you listened, and to your relief you were certain that there was a level for laundry not very far from where you were at, and even then he'd have someone else to cushion his fall!)

It looked like you wouldn't have to instigate the arrival of the third underling. Viola snapped and stormed, wondering who the hell was making his men disappear, and the third man exited to find you lounging about in the hallway, an abandoned rolling chair a little way away from you as you pretended to make a phone call.

"Something's happened," you told him with affected panic as you pretended to pause your conversation. "A bunch of men keep running past my room! I think there's trouble!"

"You stupid fucking bitch!" he snapped. "Which way did they go?"

You pointed in a direction, but you couldn't hold your indignation in as he began to leave. "You know," you said, "I really *hate* being called stupid."

"Wh…"

He had only half-turned when you punched him in the eye. You actually hadn't meant to punch him in the eye, but you'd overreached your destination of his throat and you accidentally nearly blinded him. He tried to scream, but you hurriedly kicked him in the kneecaps and shoved him to the ground, stepping on his throat so that he couldn't make a sound.

He tried to croak out, "Monster!" which made you irritated. Of course you weren't a monster! You were stupidly in love, which was only slightly better. What a hypocrite–monster! *Who* worked for a crime lord? *Who* executed innocent policemen all the time? *Who* was beating up some blameless, handsome fiancé of yours?

"You're so terrible!" was your professional reply. "You could have just left me alone!"

After a while he must have passed out from lack of oxygen "or whatever," so you put him in your rolling chair and rolled him to the lift (or elevator, was it? This was America!), putting him inside with you and hitting the button for the floor with the pool. It was closed now, so nobody was around to see you suspiciously rolling out an unconscious man and leaving him there. You wished you'd been in a mob so you knew how to properly dispose of bodies. What a sight for all the cleaning staff to find! The laundry workers must be crying!

Now… It was time for the big cheese… The head honcho… Well, those names seemed a little too bowdlerized for a big crime boss who would probably kill you if you weren't absolutely and completely careful. But now wasn't the time to be *absolutely and completely careful*… Viola certainly wouldn't leave the safety of his room and hostage, and if you didn't hurry, he'd probably call more men. Now was the time to be rash, and you wished you could be like Sherlock and be rash and brilliant at the same time. The least you could do was try!

You went back into your room, wondering if anyone was going to call the police after they'd heard your TV being shot out, but you supposed that it wasn't the sort of hotel where someone called the police after hearing gunshots, and you felt bitter that you yourself hadn't gotten the opportunity to fire your own weapon… It certainly would have made things easier!

Now what, though? You couldn't blindly shoot through the wall or door. What if you hit Sherlock by accident? You had to see where Viola was! …so out you went back onto the ledge, throwing the window open and clambering back out. You had half a mind to wedge something under the opening so that it wouldn't fall and leave you trapped on the ledge, *but*… You were riding on adrenaline and nothing could stop you from going on.

You peeked into Viola's room to find that, indeed, he was the last remaining victim. He was brandishing his own firearm at a seemingly unruffled Sherlock, and you were instantly irritated that someone was even *considering* shooting your ex-fiancé even though it happened all the time. You had to do something before Viola panicked and killed him on accident… But what? It wasn't like you could just knock on the window and hope that he opened it up so that you could push him out. You weren't even armed! All you had was a gun, and…

…oh! Yes, you still had your gun, and you were certain that now was the time to use it. You knew your own firearm better than you knew your own pets, and you knew the precise way you'd have to fire it to hit Viola without the minor recoil causing you to fall off the ledge. You poised yourself outside the window, bracing yourself and fixing yourself so that you wouldn't blow yourself to your doom. You had to be careful… *Careful*…

And then Viola clicked the safety off of his pistol and you panicked, firing immediately. You'd purposely aimed high so that you'd hit (or at least graze) Viola while missing Sherlock, but in your panic you'd fired so high that you ended up hitting the ceiling fan. Immediately you were filled with shame that you'd failed at such a task, but after a harrowing moment, the ceiling fan fell, resulting in a direct hit on Viola… so you'd downed him on complete accident! But it was still admirable!

Sherlock had flinched when he'd heard the gunshot, which you couldn't blame him for, since he hadn't been expecting it–he hadn't expected anything but his own death, most likely! Upon noticing that he wasn't the victim, though, he looked down in shock before turning back around to see *you*… And what a time to see you, after your whole separation! What a place to be reunited!

Slowly, still in shock, he stood up easily from the chair, and it was apparent that he'd picked his handcuffs a while ago, since they slid easily off of his hands. He rushed to the broken window to pull it open, only to find you halfway back to your own room.

“What the *hell* do you think you’re doing?!” he demanded, disbelief radiating from both his posture and tone.

“You mean, on a ledge, here in New York, or shooting at people?” was your brilliant reunion statement.

“I don’t know!” he fumed, and despite the madness of it, he seemed angrier and more flustered than he had been when he was being held hostage. “I’m sure you can explain it to me once you get *down* from there!”

“I’m working on it!” you retorted, sidling on back to your own room.

“Where are you going?” There was a stroke of pure desperation in his voice that stopped you dead, and you faced him with shock. Was Sherlock *panicking*? He should be able to deduce that you were perfectly all right! Instead he was being dysfunctional, only seeing you precariously placed on a ledge, and not the obvious…! “Come back here!”

“I’m only next door!”

Your logic was sound, but only to you. “You were closer to *this room*, you idiot!”

You turned to shoot a sharp glare at him. “Oh, yes, *I’m* an idiot. What a time I’ve had, *bumbling* around New York City to stumble upon you!”

“Yes, yes, I *apologize*! Get off the ledge, *please*!”

“I’m not buying *real estate*, Sherlock! I’m just getting to the other side…”

It wasn’t your intention to start a big row countless stories up, but you really were just trying to get to your own room… Well, that and you could feel yourself beginning to falter. Sherlock Holmes was alive and well, and you were struck with the memories of that terrible fight you’d had him and all the things you’d said to him–all the things you’d accused him of. You were balking like crazy as you inched over, suddenly afraid of him even as you were relieved and overjoyed.

“What’s the matter with you?” he called out as you got farther away, and now his voice was overcome with anxiety. “This isn’t really the time to bring up what’s happened, is it?”

“It’s not about *that*!” And it was half-true, really… It’s not like you refused to move until he apologized for everything, after all. Rather, you were reluctant because *you* felt guilty over it!

You were nearly to your own room when you saw the window flip you the bird before sliding all the way down, clicking and locking in place. Cursing in frustration, you momentarily let go of the wall, which to Sherlock must have seemed drastic, since he wasn’t aware of how much space you had. His voice was immediately laced with panic as he called out for you to come nearer to him, and when you turned to him in surprise of his tone it must have appeared that you were going to fall right off, because when he called out your name his tone jumped from panic to fear.

Fear! You had never seen Sherlock Holmes afraid, much less heard him–heard the strained desperation, the attempt to keep his voice even, the rush of his words as they ran together. Certainly he had been afraid for you before, maybe only once or *twice* before, but you had never seen it yourself, and therefore never seen it so palpable.

“All right, I’m coming over!” you replied, although you were sure that he couldn’t hear properly from this distance, and you thought, *oh, it’ll be fine…*

“Just what do you want me to do, then?” he demanded, leaning halfway out the window to scrutinize you–you feared for a moment that he’d step right out onto the ledge too! “*Please* come over!”

“Yes, I’m making my way *over*…”

“What do you want me to *say*?”

“Nothing, I’m being honest,” although you were hugging the wall so tightly that you feared that your half of the conversation was being lost. “I mean it. I’ll be right with you in just a moment…”

There was a sudden gust of wind and you paused, which made it look as if you were indecisive about making your way to safety–which would have seemed stupid, since you weren’t fifteen and your love affairs didn’t matter more to you than your own skin, but Sherlock was in a moment of pure terror and could no longer think rationally.

“Are you still honestly thinking of what happened?” he barked. “Now isn’t exactly the time!”

“I… *what*?” Now you were angered, shooting daggers at him from your position halfway across the ledge. “You…!”

“*What*?”

You hadn’t meant to bring any of it up while you were so delicately balanced on the hands of fate, but he provoked you, and you could hardly stand it. “You… And what do you care? I’m not even important to you!”

“You absolute idiot! Of course you are! If you’d bothered to pay attention at all, you would have known it!”

Obviously you’d become accustomed to your ledge, since you deemed it fit to argue on. “Well, excuse *me* for *not noticing it* when *you* couldn’t keep yourself away from Irene Adler!”

Ah, yes, the name that had driven the wedge between the two of you! “*Irene Ad–?!*” he spat. “You wouldn’t listen to anything I had to say! I was trying to tell you what happened!”

“I know what happened…!”

“No, you don’t! If you would motivate yourself to hurry a bit, I could tell you!”

Had you not been compelled to keep your hands on the wall, you would have thrown them up in the air. Incorrigible man! “Oh, shut up! Just *shut up*! You don’t even care!”

“Yes, I *do*, if you would bother to just read between the lines!”

“I don’t get what I’m supposed to be *reading*!”

“My God! *Doctor Manette, I love your daughter fondly, dearly, disinterestedly*, so on and so forth!”

“I…” You were nearly blown off the ledge in pure disbelief. “…what?”’

“Yes, yes, I love you; that’s been established and it’s not necessary to repeat at this precise point in time! Now please get the *hell off that damned ledge*!”

“I’m almost *there*…” And indeed you were, for Sherlock’s panic, now potent, had brought about yours and after a brief pause you sort of leapt into his room.

He caught you, which would have been nice, except he immediately flipped you over so that you were beneath him. Impassioned, he grabbed the front of your coat and shook it fiercely.

“What’s wrong with you?” Sherlock demanded. “You know, I never had any concerns that you were an imbecile, but tap-dancing on a ledge for far too long makes me a bit suspicious. Not to mention that you clearly haven’t eaten in over a day and you’ve hardly gotten any rest, and yet you think *that* makes you prepared?!”

From above you, you could feel his heart hammering into your chest even as he tried to remain calm. Your head was bouncing harmlessly against the soft carpet as he shook you. You said, “This position seems eerily familiar…”

“What were you doing, anyway? Did you have any *idea* what you were doing?”

“Yes, I did!” you snapped back. “I was in control!”

“Oh, *rea*lly?”

“The two men down the laundry chute and the one unconscious by the pool would say so, *yes*!”

“I can’t believe you! I really, honestly, can’t believe you…!”

You’d filled your air with lungs in preparation for a bitchy counterattack, but your chest deflated when you looked into his eyes–*really* looked–and saw how palpable his anger and alarm were. The sincerity of both emotions made you realize that what he’d said while you were out on the ledge was also true… You had never seen him in such an impassioned state, and you had never seen his emotions so raw and powerful. You had thought as he had: that he had a heart that never ruled his head, that he had cleansed himself of all useless emotion and that there was no feeling left in him. But you had singlehandedly brought forth a flood of emotions that you thought were alien to Sherlock Holmes… Fear, pain, anger, desperation, distress, and, finally, immense relief. He was just as human as you, and felt the same things you felt, perhaps more strongly than *you* had, since you were still numb from the whole affair.

Sherlock had fallen silent, perhaps waiting for you to reply, and you served to only further upset him–you grew teary-eyed and nearly began to cry.

“I thought…” You stopped, wiping your eyes childishly with a free arm. “I thought you didn’t care about me! I thought… you liked Irene Adler, and you didn’t like me anymore…”

It all sounded so incredibly *teenage* when you said it, and you were embarrassed that you’d gotten worked up about it in the first place. But it was genuine and sincere and you still weren’t quite over it. It had upset you so badly that you couldn’t simply just *get* over it… You needed some sort of affirmation that you were special to him, and that he wouldn’t stray from you.

“Erm… That’s all right… There, there…” He had always been left clueless when you were about to cry, and he awkwardly patted the top of your head. “…cheer up…! Yes… Of course I… *like* you.”

“I thought… I *thought*… But…” You wriggled around as your melancholy turned to anger. “Yes, you were! You were always impressed by her; everything you did, you were impressed by her! You went all the way to Karachi to get her ass out of trouble, and that’s when you slept with her!”

“It was preservation,” he insisted, shaking his head weakly as he tried to level with you. “She was impressive, yes, in the way that you always found your Stanley impressive, but I didn’t… No, I didn’t sleep with her at all, but you wouldn’t believe me. I didn’t…”

“But that’s the thing! I was never as impressive as her, never as good, not even as *sexy*, for God’s sake!”

“You…!” He sighed, exasperated. “Of course you are *impressive*. Not as much as someone like me, of course–”

“Of course–”

“But how can you tell me I don’t find you impressive? Why would I have asked you to be my wife if I didn’t find you impressive?”

“I…” You frowned. “But… Irene…”

“It’s *your* fault I’ve shown a sexual interest in anything since birth! Yet, somehow, you’ve gotten the incredibly ridiculous notion in your head that I have the intention of sleeping around with as many women as possible while we’re *clearly* in a monogamous relationship!”

You stopped squirming for long enough to realize that he was speaking as if you were still together in the present tense, which, technically, you’d been guilty of as well.

“And the bitterest part was,” he went on flatly, “that you didn’t trust me at all. You didn’t believe me for a moment… And then, what? You told me that we weren’t equals, and you then you said that…” He frowned, and for a moment you noticed that he actually seemed injured. “You said that I thought you were my *guinea pig*.”

It had seemed impossible to do, but–you had actually hurt him, and the realization made you feel so guilty you were almost sick. It was true that you never would have spoken to anyone else in the way that you had spoken to him when you’d broken up with him, and you had never stopped regretting it. But had only ever allowed yourself to be so harsh because you thought he had a higher tolerance for that sort of thing, and he wouldn’t care at all if you were cruel. Now it seemed that he cared, and he did *more* than care; he was bothered by it.

“I’m s-sorry,” you replied, a little shaky and on the verge of tears–a product of you being frustrated and tired and overwhelmed by the whole situation.

"But you meant it when you said it, or else you wouldn't have said it. Somehow you feel you're unimportant, and such thoughts are only strengthened due to the fact that I'm not constructed in a way to continuously reassure you that you are. But you are–I can't explain it. With you, I…" He was thoughtful, trying to piece everything together properly. "I can understand certain matters better. I pay attention more closely, work harder, make deductions faster; I don't quit anything until I'm finished with it. So far I haven't found a proper reason for it, but nevertheless I know that I do need you, in those ways."

To hear him say that mere minutes of him finally telling you that he loved you was almost too much to bear–you were absolutely overcome with love for him, shamelessly filled with deeper affection and respect for him than ever before. But you were still a bit reluctant–you still recalled what he'd said. "You didn't want to love anyone like that, Sherlock, that's what you said… about your heart and your head."

The reminder seemed to embarrass him. "Yes, I do recall. Sentimentality has no place in my line of work, to be sure. But I don't feel *sentimentality* with you. That means over-exaggeration, overindulgence. But before, it was different… I know because would mock it otherwise, and it's more complex than that. But I told you; I can't explain it…"

You didn't need him to… No, you didn't need him to! Because in that moment you understood him better than you had in your whole while of engagement to him. You felt his feelings toward you, the sincerity, the genuine emotion, even though he himself couldn't grapple with them. Those around him considered him some sort of cold-hearted machine, but after being with him you'd already understood that he felt empathy just as any other, and therefore it made sense that he would feel pain and bitterness as any other. And, by some stroke of luck or some random freakish force of nature that was *you*, he was also capable of feeling deep intimacy and companionate love. Perhaps he couldn't express it in way that was familiar to you, and he probably would never be able to, but the fact that you could accept that and still love him for it made you feel all the more closer to him.

Still, the reminder of your moody time apart made you miserable. He was right in that you'd tried to punish him because you didn't trust him, and, reflecting on that stormy day, you'd been so caught up in your own self-loathing and disapproval that you hadn't listened to anything he'd tried to say to you. And you'd only ever been suspicious of him when he was working with Irene Adler… You loved him more than anyone else, and you'd let her be successful and wedge herself between the two of you, and for that reason you felt yourself beginning to tear up again.

"Um," he said, noticing your imminent tears. "Don't do that."

"Sherlock…"

"I mean, yes, *please* don't do that."

"Why did she have to come, anyway?" you burst, beating weakly at his shoulders. "I love you too, Sherlock, I love you so much. But she… We were so… we were so *happy*…! I'd never been happier before…"

He was disarmed by your sudden wobbliness and grew panicky, unable to figure out the proper course of action. He clumsily patted your hair, trying to mimic things that you did to calm down your own female friends, saying, "It's all right… I'm right here…"

What he meant was that he was, literally, *physically* right there and there was no reason for you to be upset when he was so close in proximity and able to talk to you. But you also took it to mean emotionally, that he was at least *there*, and it was the first time you'd been close to him in so long… You were just glad that fate had shoved you together so fiercely that you had to get everything out in the open, and you were both better for it.

"Sherlock," you said suddenly, "let me up, please."

"*Now* what is it?"

"Let me *up*!"

He did, and for a split second it seemed that the both of you had the exact same thought running through your heads, because he was lacing his fingers through your hair at the same time that you were putting your arms around his neck, so when you both crashed together, it was simultaneously. As soon as you did it recalled how long it'd been since you kissed him, and kissed him *properly*, so all of your hunger and relief and fear and anxiety dissipated in the action. You were pressed so close together that it was difficult to tell where one ended and the other began, as if you were trying to absorb each other through osmosis… searching, needing, frantic and impassioned. The two of you were finally reunited and you were kissing as if you'd never get the opportunity to see each other again. In that way he could be almost adolescently rash and desperate, losing his imperious demeanor for just a bit in order to level with you.

You only broke apart for the air that you couldn't get while focusing all of your attention on each other. You felt the incredibly rush of need, need for *him*, and you wanted him so badly that you'd thought you'd cry. Moreover, he felt the same way, and he was watching you catch your breath with such intensity that you thought he might take you right there on the carpet of the hotel, but before he could you both heard grumbling coming from several feet away.

Ah… That's right. Viola was still there, forgotten and incapacitated under the fallen ceiling fan, but he had risen and was blundering around, trying to get his head straight. Sherlock, irritated by this minor inconvenience to his plans for screwing you blind, took no time in dragging him towards the window and practically throwing him out onto the ledge.

"Try not to fall," was his entire advice before slamming the window shut and locking a major crime boss of New York City onto a ledge. You stared in disbelief as Sherlock turned back to you, haughtily grumbling and complaining about America, and a thought passed through your mind and you smiled widely.

"What?" he asked, smirking a little and pleased at your better mood.

You sighed, pleased, and stood to stretch your limbs. "I was just thinking… You know, I was upset about what happened with Irene because I thought she was better than me. Now I don't think that any more… But the bigger issue was that I never thought I was good enough for you, Sherlock. You were always so brilliant, so fantastic, and I thought you'd hate having to drag me around everywhere, me being all slow and anything. But…"

"…but…?"

"But, I think, after all of this… Tracking you down because of a few sentences and a picture you took… Getting here, getting to you…" You smiled wider. "I think I'm pretty brilliant, too."

For the first time all night he smiled just as widely as you and he said *yes* and the way he said it made you believe that he wasn't merely agreeing with you, but that he was hit by smug pride that you finally believed an idea that he'd upheld all along. Watching him with careful eyes you had the feeling that you needed him again, this time telling him so.

"I think we might want to leave first," he remarked, looking out the window to where Viola had his back against the wall and was screaming his head off. "I don't think that this is *quite* the best place to be."

"But aren't you worried? What if he tries to come after you?"

"I'd hardly think so. He's got enough enemies to worry about; plus he knows that I know about his seven sons in Belarus and he's more than a little disconcerted." Sherlock approached you again, examining you closely with a single glance. "It's been nearly a day and a half since you've eaten properly. What's gotten into you?"

"*You*, you fantastic idiot."

"I told you; it wasn't very pressing. I could have handled the whole thing by myself… Your presence, though surprising, was nevertheless unnecessary."

"Oh, I'm sure it was unnecessary… Being held hostage is always a great plan. Where's the policeman you worked with? Don't tell me he's dead!"

"No, he fainted right after I told him we were going into the hotel… But that's a long story, and I'm sure it doesn't need telling when there will be a small army of NYPD on their way up once they realize what's happened."

"That's a good point!" You reached forward to take his hand and press it between both of yours–an agreement, a mutual understanding–all the night had been about. "Where do you want to go, then, Sherlock?"

"I think that we both require some seeing-to," he replied, humoring you as you took out a handkerchief and dabbed at the shallow cuts and minor bruises on his body. "But we both know that you practically start to lose your own speech when you don't eat anything for a while… Dinner?"

You sighed, relieved, as your body calmed down and your stomach screamed profanities at you. "I could use that, thank you…" …and of course you could still sleep together that night, but for right then it was extremely possible to just bask in the warmth of each other's presence… You wanted to, and you would…

So you laced your fingers in his (for he wouldn't do such soft things on his own!) and he opened the door–so the two of you could leave that room together.

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# Chapter 44: Via, resti servita, madama brillante

**Author's Notes:** okay i had no reason to not update this for so long buT here it is

also i wrote out what he was doing in karachi but i'm sure some of you have already read it so MVOVIGO ON ...

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For you, it was hard to focus on the fact that you'd just assaulted a handful of dangerous criminals. It wasn't that you couldn't wrap your mind around it, but rather, the fact was so arbitrary that you discarded any concern about it entirely. Sherlock Holmes had driven you in the path of worse, and you could say with complete honesty that you were focused less on the fact that you might be somewhat in danger and more on the fact that you had reunited with your fiancé and wanted to sleep with him again.

Sherlock, of course, could always put logical matters over primal urges, and with an ounce of planning he sent you a ways ahead of him so that you could leave first. You were unwilling to venture more than a few feet from the hotel, wary that you'd never see him again if he strayed for too long, and you were resilient in your efforts to stand outside the revolving doors with an air of importance until he returned. The moment you stepped outside it started to drizzle, and by the time it took Sherlock to exit the hotel you were halfway to being soaked.

He'd procured an umbrella from some unknown destination, and after taking a look at your damp form, he smirked. "'You're so wet,'" he quoted, "'and I haven't even *done* anything to you yet.'"

"What? I…" You frowned as you remembered it. "Oh, you! I was trying to be sexy. All women try it, at one point or another. Where'd you get that?"

"This is America. They give things out for free all the time, if you look pompous and rich enough."

"But really, where did you…?"

"We might attempt to flee the crime scene with some sort of urgency."

"Yes, yes, of course…"

You stayed close by him as you both ventured through the streets of New York City, and as he stayed by your side you watched him carefully out of the corner of your eye. You were acquainted with the fact that Sherlock would never do grandiose gestures for you, or do so much as vocalize any type of intimacy towards you. But there did seem to be something soft about the way he gave you nearly the entire umbrella as cover, and the way that he glanced down at you repeatedly whenever you were stopped at a crosswalk. When it stopped raining you demanded that he free up his hands so that you could hold one of them, and he did so with such a lack of hesitation that it could be construed as enthusiasm… And when you insisted on riding the ~~tube~~ subway, despite the awful hygiene, he always stood by you at such an angle to brace you whenever it started or jerked to a stop.

Did he mean to do any of it? Maybe, or maybe not. But even if it was an unconscious urge, some deep primal persuasion to do nice things for you, it still meant that he had *wanted* to do it. There was a constancy in his presence that made you smile. He was still and would forever be an insufferable man–that much was true. But it comforted you that you couldn't wholeheartedly accuse him of not caring about you…

You both finagled your way into a restaurant that was halfway decent, and you set to work with filling your stomach. Now that the danger had passed, your stomach cried out with misery at being put aside, and you congratulated yourself on all your efforts by keeping yourself sated. Sherlock ate as little as usual (he always thought your three-meals-a-day was gratuitous), but kept a close eye on you as if you'd vanish halfway through eating your entrée. There was radio playing from somewhere and it was saying *he needs me, he doesn't know it but he needs me*, and the longer Sherlock listened the more you could see that he was fidgeting, so you decided to distract him.

"So when do you want to leave?" you asked once you'd gotten just enough food to resume speaking. "Tomorrow morning, right? Or do you want to visit your fainted cop?"

Your free hand inched over to his with subtle determination. You hoped that he didn't notice it before it reached its destination… If he pulled away it might be too much for you to bear. But he didn't seem bothered by the touch and in fact gave into it, his eyes still attentive on you.

"No real rush," he replied. "It's just lucky that we ended up in a halfway interesting location."

"Oh, true, but we can leave if you have business back in London… I wouldn't want you to get bored."

It came off of your tongue faster than you could think about it, and you regretted it immediately. Sherlock's reciprocated grip on you tightened for half a moment after you said it, and with a pang of guilt you knew that you'd stung him. One of the causes of your fight with him had been that you thought you weren't good enough for him, and you stating outright that you weren't interesting enough to hold his attention brought the whole business back to the surface.

"I'll live," he said, keeping his voice even. "I won't run out of work. I might, however, run out of time to spend away from the mind-numbing idiocy of Londoners."

"And you must like New Yorkers so much better."

"At least they have the courtesy of speaking quickly."

For some reason, that made you like him even better, and you raised his hand to kiss his fingers–it was a gesture you liked to do often when you were dating, and you found yourself missing it abruptly and inexplicably. He started in his seat when you did it, and you finished off your meal in its entirety and politely requested the bill.

At that point both of you were ushering each other out of the door, and you weren't sure which of you had the greater urgency. The need for closeness was so potent that it hung around you both as an aroma.

"Where were you staying?" you asked as you two hurried down the sidewalk.

"Not too far from here…"

"Oh–wait!"

"What?"

"I forgot to do something."

Against Sherlock's grumbling complaints, you led him around towards a more familiar location–past a place on the corner. Inside, you could see Grissom packing up his things, evidently finished with his day of being an accomplice to thievery. You tapped on the window and he looked up with alarm, breaking out into a wide smile as he saw the two of you secure and holding hands. You blew him a soppy kiss which he caught, and Sherlock shot you both a startled glare as you departed.

"You *know* him?"

"Of course. Who do you think helped me find you?"

"Anyone but *him*."

"Don't be cruel about Grissom, Sherlock. He's a lovely man and I'll have you know that he's my new boyfriend… Why else do you think I had to pay him a visit?"

That seemed to make him even more speechlessly outraged, and you almost laughed out loud at him. Had he always been this envious over men who held your special attention? You had thought that you were the only one…! "Relax, oh, wow! He knows we're engaged."

The remark had seemed correct to you up until the point where you walked a little way to find that Sherlock had stopped dead in his tracks, staring at you like you'd just announced that you yourself were James Moriarty. You looked at him, perturbed. "What?" The realization slapped you across the face. "I… Oh."

He crossed over to you in a second, taking you by the shoulders and shaking you lightly. "Did you mean it?"

"Well, what else?"

"*Did* you? This is incredibly important. For once in your life I mean to say that you shouldn't screw up your answer."

"Yes!" you cried out, joyful exasperation coursing through you. "Yes, Sherlock, I'd still like to be engaged to you, if you don't mind it that much."

You two stood in that suspended animation for a moment before he released you, sighing and then covering it up by clearing his throat as he continued on his way. "G-Good, then. Better for us to not be believing different things. Terrible errors in communication."

"Like we haven't had enough of those. Oh, but I'd drop you in a minute for a man who sings like Pavarotti."

He glared down at you and you kissed him, right before your previous determination prodded at you. "It's getting dark now, Sherlock… Can we go back to the hotel?"

He agreed with you, attempting to conceal his haste, and in a spinning blur you somehow found your way back to where he was staying. As you approached his room, you could feel his usual confidence begin to ebb away, replaced with wariness despite the fact that you hadn't left his side. As he searched his jacket for a keycard, he looked down at you and you smiled up at him. And, despite the fact that he was still perhaps still the most abrasive person you'd ever met, he did seem to relax an infinitesimal amount next to you.

You told him that you wanted a shower and he admitted that he need one as well, but the tension between the two of you made you stammer and ask if you could go first rather than with him, and he agreed. As he took his turn, you wandered around the hotel, exploring the nice décor and talking a bit with strangers, if only to relax yourself into conversation. You were on your way back to the room when you heard Sherlock call your name, and you turned to see him jogging (that is, actually affecting a hurried pace) up to you.

"Oh, are you done already?" you asked, surprised.

"You… I thought…" He stopped both in pace and in conversation. "Well, it seemed…"

"What were you running around for? You didn't get into more trouble, did you?"

"No, of course not…"

Even though he had few expressions on his face that weren't cold boredom or snide imperiousness, you could still tell that something was bothering him. And what? He didn't think you'd up and abandon him right after saying you still wanted to be engaged… Right? It would be a silly thing to think about…

"That is," he went on, clearing his throat, "it was obvious that you went out to look around. For instance, you left your cell phone, *as usual*. Not to mention that you–"

"I didn't say anything that would make you think I'd want to go anywhere, stupid," you replied with a smile, prodding him in the side. "I met someone interesting just a second ago… Has something extraordinary ever happened to you but it seemed really banal?"

"Extraordinary things don't happen."

"Ooh, yes they do, listen… There was a man, and he came up to me–he had a British accent, I thought that was strange. He wanted to know if I had a spare shoelace on me, and luckily for him I had one in my coat pocket… He seemed nice, and he had a really lovely-looking woman next to him. I was going to ask him his name, but–are you *listening*?"

And he wasn't, because he was opening your hotel room once more, and immediately there came from him a pure aroma of panic and stress. As usual he attempted to not show a single ounce of anything that wasn't his usual confidence, but whenever you got too close to him he backed away a bit, as if wary that you might come closer and prove yourself to be an illusion.

The television was on, and it was saying something about *alleged trafficker Arcangelo Viola coaxed off of ledge after suspected suicide attempt*, and with some interest you watched the rest of the news report. Apparently there were some half-conscious underlings complaining about being assaulted by a stranger, but their descriptions didn't match up–it seemed that they were caught between you being a 5'0" bald woman, a mid-height Asian man, and a rotund collegiate. You turned it off, offended that nobody could get *you* right while they would most certainly remember Sherlock Holmes…

Sherlock was on the bed, watching your movements, and he only looked down in embarrassment when you turned to smile at him. For once it seemed to you that you were the one with power in the room… That is, the power to make the other feel self-conscious and insignificant. But you didn't want Sherlock to feel anything less than what he was to you, which was loved and respected, and most certainly not the source of anger and hostility. So you joined him on the bed, him watching you carefully and with some suspicion as you clambered over.

"You're so far away," you said with a grin as you moved to him. "Please, come closer…" After the successful venture of clambering over to him on your knees in a rather un-seductive fashion (yet comforting in its familiarity), you kissed him once more and immediately felt a change in his entire body.

He had always been a certain creature that was ethereal, his body a shell to encase his almost infinite mental prowess. Even in your time of dating him, you'd never fooled yourself into believing that you knew all of him all the time–he could always slip between your fingers at any minute. But now you were certain that he had become putty in your hands, if only for that exact moment. He gave way to you immediately, letting you press yourself to his side and part his lips with your own. It had been a very, very long time since you'd been even halfway intimate with him and it was very possible that he had lost most of his confidence in the art. So you took over for him, letting him move as he wanted and touch as he pleased.

His long fingers fumbled at the buttons on your shirt as he tried to both kiss you and undo your blouse at the same time. He could hardly stop distracting himself with you, almost afraid that you would vanish if he didn't do everything he thought he was supposed to. He moved deliberately and carefully, slipping his hand underneath your shirt when he was finally finished, fondling you with care as he deepened his attentions to you. You were soft in movements and sounds, encouraging him until he had gradually eased himself back to being the lover that you remembered. After a little while of your unending patience, he gained more confidence and worked more earnestly, removing the clothes of both you with ease (which surprised you, since you couldn't quite recall *not* kissing him in that interlude). Your hands found between his legs and his whole body went rigid against your touch as you leaned your head against his cheek.

"It's been a long time since I've touched you, Sherlock," you murmured, putting a bit more pressure into it and making his breath catch. "And I've missed you. I mean it."

Your fear of him having slept with Irene Adler was somewhere far in the back of your mind–right now, the idea seemed almost unbelievable to you. The thought had occurred to you in the first place because you'd thought that Sherlock had no longer found you appealing in the face of your brief rival. But such a thought seemed impossible with the reality in front of you: that Sherlock had gotten hard from just kissing you and by having the thought of being with you, and even now he trembled and gasped by the simple act of you touching him.

"Sherlock," you said, moving your hand, "I want to ask you something. About Karachi…" You felt him flinch beside you, and he turned his gaze away from you. "No, no–I mean, I believe you… About you not doing anything. But you *were* gone for a while. What happened?"

"The idiot who was supposed to secure our transport was delayed," he told you. "It was forty-eight hours before his return."

Your mention of his absence was making him a little moody, evidently because it was a catalyst to your separation. You pressed yourself against him once more and kissed his shoulder. "Then if you didn't do anything with Irene Adler, what *did* you do?"

"I…" He trailed off, reluctant to continue, and for once he seemed downright sheepish. "Nothing."

"No, you were going to say something… What?"

"It isn't anything."

You shook his shoulder gently. "You can tell me, Sherlock. I'll believe it."

"It's that I…" For once you could see that a streak of red had crossed his face, and despite the fact that you had once thought the situation to be so incredibly rare it could happen once every hundred years, it seemed that Sherlock was so humiliated that he was blushing. "I… *pleasured* myself… to the thought of… well, you, obviously."

You blinked at him, utterly drowning in disbelief. "Sherlock… you actually… masturbated?"

"Yes, if that's the term you wish to use," he grumbled, impatient.

"You know *how* to?"

"It isn't hard to figure out."

"And about *me*?"

It seemed like such an unbelievable occurrence that it would have made more sense to you to hear that Sherlock had gotten five hookers in the room to use instead. But the thought also made you so overjoyed that you were practically giddy, and you now threw yourself upon him, resuming your extended snog as you fondled him relentlessly. To you it seemed he deserved every reward and you were willing to give them to him–and he was willing to reciprocate, given the fact that his hand had gone between your thighs and you were once more recalling the fact that Sherlock knew how to put your body to good use.

The wait was pleasurable yet torturous until Sherlock could no longer ignore primal urges, and he flipped you onto your back and, after carefully parting your legs, kneeled between them. Automatically your legs tried to close, and you reveled in the feeling of your thighs once more being held apart by his. He was close, so *close*, and he was exactly where you had wanted him to be…

He was pressed against your body, and now it was impossible to ignore the fact that you could feel him trembling a bit against you. He had evidently attempted to mentally prepare for this moment but came up short when the time came, and the realization that he'd be having sex with you for the first time in months had dawned upon him. You tried to calm him, kissing his neck as he adjusted his body in little ways, and only after your murmured into his ear that you loved him did he shiver and press himself into you.

There was tension in his body for every inch he pushed into you, and his breath shortened until it became little more than gasps as he readjusted to the feeling of being completely inside of you. He was so still that you could feel him pulse inside of you, and as you murmured and wriggled, he began to regain his mental processes. You arched your back and raised your hips, easing the process as he slowly, slowly began to move.

The desire to make it as pleasurable as possible for him had come to your head before, but it became such an overwhelming urge that you couldn't ignore it in the least. You swept his curls back from his forehead and ran your fingers through his hair, pulling lightly to make him swear and push his hips more urgently against yours. You caressed every part of him that you could reach, and even then you went a little farther, trailing your fingernails all the way down his spine to squeeze at his arse. You bit into his exposed neck and kissed his shoulder, and when he began to moan and curse and claim that he couldn't make it for very long, you muttered encouragements into his ear to tell him that he felt so fantastic inside of you that you could burst.

Your attention to him definitely wasn't going unnoticed, and he was beginning to get overwhelmed. His pace inside of you had sped up and he was slamming into you, his chest pressed to yours and his teeth gritted as he did his best to hold on. He was still enormously talented and did his best to be enormously talented in everything he did, and sex with you was no exception. He licked his fingers and you knew in a moment what he was planning on doing, but there was little you could do to stop him nestling his hand in-between your rocking hips and fondling your clitoris. He knew exactly how to work you and he hadn't lost his touch, and in a blur of sweat and heat you came, his name a prayer on your tongue that you repeated over and over. You floated through myriad planes of pleasure and you weren't sure for how long, and you were brought back to reality only by the sound and feeling of Sherlock still working hard inside of you, his limbs shaking as he became desperate for his own release yet unwilling to allow himself to have it.

You weren't sure how he'd managed to hang on for so long as you pulsed and clenched around him, but he was already one foot off the edge of the world and you wanted to help bring him off of it. You kissed him as deeply as you could manage and bit down his neck, murmuring every nonsensical erotic thing that had ever come to your mind. His breath was leaving him in desperate cries as he pounded away inside of you, the friction becoming overpowering as his entire body demanded its climax.

"Sherlock, come," you murmured against his cheek as you kissed it. "Please come…"

You kissed him once more and then clenched around him as tightly as you could, and he was finished. You watched him as he came and saw his release in his eyes as you felt it fill you, and you pressed him close against you, wanting to hear every desperate moan and sigh as it left him. It took him a while to come down from his climax after such a long period of absence from you, and you held him as he finally reached equilibrium. The tension was gone in his body now, and it was gone between the two of you as you finally separated and he collapsed onto the bed.

"How do you feel?" you asked him, pressing yourself against him once more as you wrapped yourself around him.

"Truthfully?"

"You don't usually censor yourself, darling."

"Exhausted." He glanced over at you as you put an arm around his waist and marveled at the form that you had sorely missed. "But, I suppose, in a good way… Or as you would say, *not terrible*."

You closed your eyes. "Hmm."

"What?"

"It might take me another twenty years to get you to say that you love me," you grumbled. "I should have recorded you saying it."

"Oh, you and your sentiment."

"You have it too, you know."

"I… I suppose, occasionally, as an act of mortal folly…"

And it was true, considering he woke you up in the middle of that night, shaking you and saying your name to tell you that he needed you–and without a complaint you gave in, just as how he gave into you in the morning upon both of you waking. But for just then you were content, and it seemed that your contentment had spread out to your entire body, and you felt that there was simply nothing that could get in the way of your pleasure… Even for just then, but you hoped sincerely that there would be no more unforeseen circumstances to separate the two of you. You weren't so foolish that you actually believed that you could be safe from more trials and tribulations, but–both you and him believed that, perhaps, you could probably handle it. Right then you recalled how nice it was to hear Sherlock's heartbeat as he fell asleep, and it was nice–very soft, very determined–

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## Chapter 45: Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen

**Author's Notes:** s O i'm working myself out of my own hiatus which is difficult because i've been spending most of my time roleplaying and it's like ???

so i felt that it was good to write this to coincide with the new trailer we got and mostly because *i sort of want to let there be a nice break in this story before the new series airs so i'm going to move things to reichenbach a lot quicker* .... ~~god please could you all just wait until i get my muse back it 'S NOT EASY WRITING WELL WHEN GETTING OUT OF A HIATUS BEAR WITH ME~~

---

It may be true that you hated rolling out of bed, but it was easy to rouse yourself when a beautiful person was lying next to you. This was true for waking up in New York as well. Nothing quite like waking up in a tangle of human flesh to remind yourself that Sherlock Holmes was, indeed, an octopus in bed whether he liked to admit it or not. It seemed that he had been subconsciously working to completely ensure that you wouldn't leave him in the middle of the night (but where would you go?). You let him sleep, though you didn't try to wriggle your way out of his grip just yet. You were more focused on the fact that you *still* couldn't figure out where he had been hiding your engagement ring this whole time and how he managed to work it back onto your finger during sex…

There was a clock somewhere next to you on the desk and you squirmed to try and see what the time was. It was tilted away from you a bit and you reached out to turn it, thus stirring your fiancé who woke with sleepy eyes and asked you just *what* you were doing wriggling around like that? You were about to turn over and say some sort of quick and witty and sexy statement, but his hands found your breasts and he slipped a thigh between yours and you forgot about your words and the time and damn well everything else.

The next couple of days were delightfully uneventful. You and Sherlock worked slowly, letting your quick rescue of him drag out into a full holiday between the two of you. You allowed yourself to be lazy and Sherlock slowed himself down as much as he could in order to appease you. You were impressed that he could go for so long without complaining about being bored, although you considered that he was sated by the fact that you both got caught up with all the sex you'd missed during your fighting and separation.

When you both had had enough of the New York City scene and wanted to return to the land of proper tea, you took the next available to the homeland. You expected to have to wait around for an obnoxiously long time before you were able to get back to England, but mere hours after you told Sherlock that you needed to get back to make sure that your work hadn't dumped you on your ass you found yourself on a flight.

"How did you manage to get a flight to London on such short notice?" you demanded as soon as you were sitting down, and in first class, no less. "There had to be something illegal behind this."

He remained casual. "*I* don't ask *you* how you manage to do simple tasks like that, do I?"

"*No*, because *you* don't care, but I most certainly do…"

"Don't think too hard on it," he advised, getting comfortable in his seat. "You'd only scoff at it, anyway."

"Hmmph." You also tried to adjust your position, instead squirming violently until you were somewhat comfy. It was a great way to fly, true, but there was some silly complaint at the back of mind that your fiancé was on the other side of the aisle. "At least bitch-class would let us sit next to each other."

He gave you a look that was the closest thing he could get to sympathy. "We have the rest of our lives to sit next to each other, you know, and you're complaining *right now*?"

"Oh, shhh…" And then, somehow, you fell asleep and remained passed out for the entire flight, thus missing out on the spoils of first class that Sherlock indulged himself with.

You made it back to London in one place, and when Sherlock returned to 221B, it was with you in tow. John looked up from his spot by the fireplace to find the two of you holding hands and arguing good-naturedly about a tattooed vagrant you saw on the street corner. Smiling at the return to the norm, John stood to receive the two of you.

"So you two have made up, finally? No more rows for a while, eh?" he asked, still oblivious to the chaos that had occurred and settled between the two of you. "Good, then…! It was getting a bit tiresome, having to deal with all the moping… Like teenagers, the two of you!"

His smugness about the turn of events lasted for all of ten minutes, up until the point when Sherlock sat down in his own chair and you sat down on the arm of it. He looked up to find the both of you staring at him, and with a grumble he realized that the two of you still had some unfinished business left to do, and he departed to take a long walk around London until he could once more repress the reminder that his flatmate indubitably had a sex life.

Fully rejuvenated, you and your fiancé could finally work your way back to normalcy. That is, the closest thing to normalcy that the two of you could come up with. You went back to work as he attempted to break himself of his nicotine habit. You gladly omitted yourself from *that* effort, and for good reason… You were still in a relaxed state of mind and you knew that you could do without a manic Sherlock Holmes for a few days.

However, you were a bit upset that less than a week passed between your reuniting with Sherlock and his sudden departure to work on some case involving a big dog. (John had attempted to give you some more details about it, though you were knee-deep in the truffles that Sherlock had given you as appeasement and you no longer cared so long as your fiancé came back in one piece) You took advantage of your peaceful alone time and set to work on getting some personal belongings together. You hadn't gone through your photo albums in forever and it bothered you that you didn't put more effort into keeping them sorted. When you were young you didn't think that much of anything in your life was worth capturing forever, but now that you were a bit older, you had the sudden urge to take photographs of everything you could. Looking back, the things you found to be insignificant and trivial were worked over fondly in your memory, and you were upset at the notion that your time with Sherlock could be filed away with the same carelessness. You knew that when he returned, you'd have to do more to preserve those memories. If your big separation had taught you anything, it was that your time together with a person–any person, really–was so limited that it practically hung on a thread, and you could find yourself alone with no real warning.

...Meanwhile, miles away, Sherlock was getting lost in his own sentiment, although in a different way and for different reasons. He was asleep, rolled up in his covers, brooding without your familiar warmth in bed next to him. John was awake, a bout of sleeplessness falling over him as he lay staring at the ceiling.

From Sherlock's bed, John could hear faint mumbling, and he grimaced. Did that idiot genius really talk in his sleep, too? A pain in the ass. Not only was he demanding as hell when it came to their sleeping arrangements, he also had to make it that much more difficult for his roommate to fall asleep. He turned over as if trying to distance himself from the sound of it when he heard your name thrown in somewhere.

Oh, Jesus. No. *No.* His flatmate, the legendary genius Sherlock Holmes, was *not* going to have *that* kind of dream while he was lying right there. This wasn't simple awkwardness or bad timing. This was hell.

Sherlock muttered your name again and writhed in his sleep. "You…"

John half-considered slapping Sherlock awake, covering it up with some claim that he was talking as if he were having a nightmare.

But Sherlock turned back over, a slight smirk on his face as he settled further into the sheets. "You idiot," he mumbled fondly in his sleep. "Can't look through… microscope like that… It's turned off. Here… I'll get it for you…"

John sighed and pushed himself back to the bed. All right, well… Much better than the alternative. He repeated that over and over again…

…and when the two of them returned to London after the case was completed, Sherlock found you sitting on the floor of your flat, surrounded by old photographs. It seemed that your efforts to organize your memories better hadn't worked out, although Sherlock noticed that the photographs were older than you. He leaned down to find you staring at wedding pictures of your family, the one held in your hand that of (presumably) your parents. He recognized a leaner and baby-faced version of your father, while the sharp, catlike woman who was your mother was a stranger to him. She'd been dead for years, though you had theorized that it was because that both Sherlock and your mother could never exist in the same place at the same time.

"She was also a large bastard," you said fondly as you held up a picture of the stunning woman standing there in her wedding dress. "Not that we didn't get along, but she was always big on the fact that she was smarter than the rest of the family… So you two would have gotten along too beautifully."

If he squinted he could see that you sort of resembled your mother–in a vague way, at least–and he sat down in a chair behind you as you went through the other photos. He held that picture of your mother and stared at it blankly. Ordinarily he'd have no use for photographs due to his memory (he either cared about an event enough to remember it or he didn't), but there was something so sentimental and emotional about the photograph that he'd somehow feel guilty if he let go of it. This was a wedding, a union that would result in the birth of the woman who would be his fiancée. And, eventually, that would be *you* in a wedding dress, walking down the aisle with a stupid and attractive smile on your face as you strode on toward him.

It still surprised him that he *existed*, that he had enough presence in the universe to eventually take place in an event that he thought reserved for other people: people who could afford to create emotional connections and become intimate with other people. Was he lowering himself by participating or was he evolving as a human being? He wasn't sure. Further research was still required, although in every situation he endeavored to be satisfied with his decisions and not regret them.

Suddenly your cheek was on his thigh and he nearly jumped. You were looking up at him with watchful eyes, as if you were going to pick apart every self-doubting thought in his mind with a single glance.

"Is this too sentimental for you?" you guessed, placing your hands in your lap as you continued watching him. "You don't care about things like this, do you?"

By *this* he wasn't sure if you meant looking at pictures of other weddings or the entire idea of weddings themselves. Either way, he was at a loss. Certainly the gratuitous show of emotions was a foreign concept to him, but if his tribulations in New York were anything to go by, he wasn't a stranger to it. He supposed that the answer lay in the fact that he had grown almost terrified by the idea of *not* being married to you, and he was so desperate to maintain your happiness that he would do anything up to and including amputating his own leg if it meant that yours could be saved. Not that he wouldn't be able to find a better alternative to the situation…

"I want you to be my wife," he stated simply, and the intimacy in your position was so overwhelming that he nearly felt woozy by it. "And therefore I… care about… the things that you want to do."

There was a harrowing moment where you simply stared at him before you broke out into a smile, backing away from him. "Oh, you don't know how to say anything, do you…? But that makes it easy for me because I never have to sit through any speeches."

You were back to the floor. There was a pile of magazines lying around, and Sherlock could tell from a single glance that they were bridal catalogues. You were flipping through them, glancing aimlessly at everything in store.

"I haven't even picked out a wedding dress," you told him with a grimace. "But I think that's appropriate, considering we don't have a date picked out or anything… But there's been so much going on that it hasn't been the most important thing."

"Who cares what you wear, anyway?" he asked, closing his eyes and resting his head back. "It won't change what will transpire, will it?"

"No, but some people like to *look* good. And what do I wear? They have dresses for each body type, you know that? And there are people who tell you, *oh, don't wear white, wear something fancy.* And then there's the decision between conservatism and the newfangled stylish things… But I don't know how I feel about the short dresses. And sleeves or no sleeves? I guess it would depend on the season. When could we get married, anyway?"

For some reason he took an odd comfort in your fussing. Coming from anyone else, it would have been trivial boredom and frivolous meandering. But from you it was a reminder that you cared about him enough to not be aloof to everything that transpired between the two of you and he supposed that he could be grateful about that.

"Oh, well… I guess we still have time to think about that," you decided, throwing the catalogues outside as you threw yourself forward onto your knees, wrapping your arms around his waist as you buried your face into his torso. "With you, I can't tell when things will slow down… So I guess we might just have to pick a date and hope that you get cases around it, eh? How about sooner rather than later? Don't think I forgot you manipulating me back when I was bleeding, telling me that it's good to get married in the fall. Besides, summer would be too soon, but we have to make sure that nothing major will be going on anytime soon…"

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# Chapter 46: Dalla sua pace la mia dipende

**Author's Notes:** i can't wait for the next chapter though
*everyone cries*

edit: i just broke 100k (or was that last chapter i don't remember) i never get this far on even original fiction SOMEONE HOLD ME

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It would be easy for you to wish that things between you and Sherlock would go a bit more smoothly, but reality wasn't quite as kind as your imagination was. The newspapers were practically obsessed with him as of late, and though you were proud of his success and the recognition of the masses, you did wish that you could walk with him without ending up the victim of some inane rumor that Sherlock Holmes was gay for John Watson or cheating on you or both.

"It's a sad world where we can't walk next to our best friends without someone trying to label us," you grumbled, going through the so-called "incriminating" photographs. "People should just mind their own business… Ah! Look at that. Now I'm going to have to go to shops and be known as *the lady whose arse Sherlock publicly grabbed*."

"Apologies," he said insincerely, adjusting his microscope incrementally.

You smiled faintly as you tossed the rags aside. "If it's any consolation, people will hardly think it's you, since it's not in-character… They'll think that it was some Holmesian stunt double sent to trick me while you ran off and had a gorgeous love affair with John."

You liked the fact that people admired him for his intelligence (even though they quickly became disillusioned when meeting him and realizing that he was a twat), but at the same time, you couldn't help but feel a bit forlorn. People were dumb, and as soon as they saw a popular figure, they became obsessed with trying to tear it down. Celebrities had a high turnover rate because the public was capricious and you knew it. How long would it take for them to turn on your fiancé? To criticize him, to mock him, to claim that there's someone smarter? A fire of protectiveness burned in your chest and you wanted to hold him away from all of them. To hell with them!

"What's the matter?" Sherlock asked without looking up.

"What's the matter with what?"

"You've gotten sad all of a sudden. I'd hazard a guess at the reason, but you throw your pity at such insignificant matters…"

It seemed impossible that you could be so torn between swatting him and lunging forward to envelop him in a hug. "I was thinking of *you*, you gorgeous idiot. What I mean is, I don't mind you being famous. But I don't want those fickle bastards saying bad things about you, understand?"

"You and John make absolutely no sense. What they say about me has nothing to do with you, correct? And I don't care, so it's inconsequential."

"Except I love you, so everything's personal." Your mind suddenly went another way and you frowned. "I hope I'm not like this with the kids… I'll be awful to all the schoolteachers and bullies."

The silence in the room only made sense to you after you thought about your previous words, and you broke out into a sweat. How the hell could you say something like that?! You'd give your fiancé a heart attack! Children! With *Sherlock Holmes*! He probably thought of them as cannon fodder or resilient young bodies for an experiment. He'd probably never thought about offspring! The thought had never crossed his mind…!

"Not that we have to have kids," you said quickly, trying your best to repair the situation as Sherlock sat completely still. "We'd have to have a conversation for it, you know…? It's not good if there's a lot of pushing and shoving. It doesn't work out that way. We could have a compromise, or…"

"Do you think that they would act like you?"

You stopped. "What? I… Oh, I'm not sure. They *might* be. It's rare to find a genius like you."

"If they acted like you, then I wouldn't care," he said, remaining calm as you continued a nervous jig from foot to foot. "That way, I'd know how to deal with them. My opinion of children in general wouldn't change, however, but it'd be a bit totalitarian to refuse you on account of the idiocy of the average child…"

You continued to stare at him, but it seemed as though he really wasn't being sarcastic. "Oh, Sherlock… I'm going to head back to work and look around in a daze for a while and question whether or not I've stepped out of reality. Would that be all right?"

As these things happen, Moriarty's plot was carried out not more than thirty minutes after you'd left. Honestly, you weren't sure if anything even surprised you anymore. Moriarty was the devil and the devil didn't like to let himself get out of shape. The commotion resulted in your fiancé testifying in the trial, but you'd have to miss it on account of work.

"They wouldn't let me have one day off for it even though it's my fiancé. Can you believe it?" you snarled, fixing his hair just a bit. "It's criminal. I want to be there for you, you know?"

"It wouldn't be necessary," he said in an attempt to assure you that he'd be all right. "My mental functions don't exactly deteriorate when removed from the light of your presence…"

"Wow! Don't be fussy. It'd mean a day off for me and support for you. A win-win…"

He was ready to go, though he didn't move as you picked tiny pieces of lint off of his clothing. (He usually kept it so clean! It was probably your fault for doing the laundry…) It was in his nature to move like the breeze, never really staying in one spot unless in the middle of an experiment, often forgetting to say hello or good-bye to you (though you were comfortably accustomed to it). And you knew how important this day was for him. The trial with James Moriarty–it meant the chance to put away his archrival for good. When would he get the opportunity again? He'd have to focus every bit of that enormous brain on the trial or else…

"Is something wrong?" you asked him, frowning, when he still did not move.

"Nothing's wrong. Why would anything be wrong? It's fine."

"Well, if you say it, then it *must* be true…" You moved your fingers over to adjust his shirt and found that his heartbeat had picked up a little.

Was he nervous? You could count on one hand the number of times you'd seen him actually *nervous*. He didn't seem to have it in him to be worried… He was always so calm, so collected! He never had to be anxious, since he was always five steps ahead of whatever it was… Maybe you'd had that effect on him here and there, but you had never seen him this way in regards to his work.

Sherlock was waiting for something from you, and it took you a moment to realize that he was waiting for what you usually gave him under such circumstance: your support and well-wishes. You were surprised, mostly because you had thought that he found it unnecessary and sentimental. You did it specifically so that you could indulge yourself without letting him do anything about it.

You stood on tiptoe to kiss him. "Good luck, Sherlock. It has to be a cakewalk, right? There's no way that they can't find him guilty unless the damn thing's rigged. Just be careful about it."

"What do you mean, *be careful*?"

"Don't be *terrible*," you advised, a soft smile on your features. "At least have John keep you in check. Now, go get him…"

–and what happened after that? Only the exact opposite of what anyone had expected. Hell, even the rags that proclaimed that we descended from aliens assumed that a guilty verdict would fall. The news came to you while you were busy at work, but as soon as you got the news on your phone you left as soon as you could to rush over to 221B.

"I can't believe that!" you cried as you slammed the door open. "That's impossible. That can't–that isn't allowed to happen! It's illegal! There's got to be some sort of retrial thing, or miscarriage of justice…"

Sherlock was silent and sitting in John's chair for some reason, so you flopped down in his chair across from him.

"You might not want to sit there," he advised.

"Why not? I sit here all the time…"

"I might have to disinfect it. Moriarty sat there not more than ten minutes ago."

"What?" you cried, jumping off of it as if it burnt your ass. "Sherlock, what do you mean? He was *here*? Why didn't you say anything?"

He was watching you, and you were unable to read his expression. If only you could know what was going on in his mind! He was seeing you in all sorts of ways: shoved in front of a speeding vehicle or tube at the last second; stabbed to death while carrying groceries; strangled in some dark alley when walking alone; and the worst one, the one most prominent in that boundless imagination, was you suspended from the ground and a hook through your shoulder as you screamed and did your best to pull yourself up to take the weight off.

What kind of man had he become?! He was not the sort of person to worry about someone else constantly. Even in the early months of dating you, when he had grown anxious in the face of your tardiness, he had never been consumed by the fear of being deprived of you. No… What seized him had not haunted him since he had thought you dead by Stanford Stanley. But he had thought that that was done and over with… Stanley was gone and therefore he couldn't believe that anyone would target you again. But his enemy was back on the streets and could do whatever he pleased.

"If you need room to think right now, that's all right," you said, guessing that he wanted to be alone after sitting down with Moriarty. "But don't shut me out… I don't want to leave you alone on this. I'll support you on anything, you understand? I know that I'm not as capable as you when dealing with something like this, but if you need me to do something, anything, I'll do it right away for you."

Sherlock stared at you, almost bemused. How could you be that way?! He wanted you to be selfish so that you wouldn't feel obligated to do anything too stressful for him. Every time he had thrown you in the path of a serial killer or robber or arsonist, you complained only about having to take time out of knitting in order to do so. You really would do anything for him and he was uncomfortable because he could hardly understand why you'd do so. Selflessness! Everything he did was to further his own ambitions, while you had no problem with giving.

"I don't see anything too stressful happening," he told you, though he himself wasn't entirely sure if it was true. "Nothing more than usual, anyway. It's nothing to bother yourself with."

You folded your arms and shifted your weight to your other foot. "You don't have to look at me like I'm some martyr, Sherlock. It's no trouble to me at all to help you. Oh–well, you might think that I can't do anything for you. At least, not with Moriarty. I can understand that. But I don't think that I mind it. At this point, I'd say that it's a pleasure…"

You were waiting for him to assure you with his usual flippancy, with a *I told you, there's nothing to worry over* or *Why are you obsessing over it? I'm certainly not*, but once more he said nothing. Underneath his collected exterior you could feel that he was troubled and you couldn't blame him. Who would be careless when meeting with their archenemy? Either way, you felt depressed for no good reason. If you had the choice you would make sure that nothing bad would ever happen to him, though he might claim that such a thing would be incredibly dull.

After a while he said, "You look tired. You could sit down."

"*There*? Ah, no. I'm going to clean it myself."

"Then…" He stopped, then started again. "Then why don't you come sit here?"

It surprised you. You usually took it upon yourself to sit on his lap, since you knew that he'd never offer. (And you only waited for the days where he had nothing going on, or else he would stand up suddenly and dump you on the ground!) But there was a sort of strange and earnest honesty in his eyes when he asked, and you went to him and fit yourself into his lap.

"You don't have to think that I'm not selfish," you murmured, trying to push yourself impossibly closer to him. "I'm plenty selfish, especially about you. It might be a lot easier for you if I wasn't around all the time, but I want to keep you all to myself. It's not just being demanding. Without you, I'd probably just hate it all…"

People still made faces when you said that you were engaged to him. Maybe they were surprised that it had lasted so long–the engagement was nearly a year old, after all. You could see it from their perspective–you wouldn't contest that he was a snide bastard when you first met him and he was still insufferable to strangers–but you wished they realized that people could change a lot over a year. Even just little, incremental changes. Perhaps that's why he sat there with you there in the uneasiness before the storm with no complaint or restlessness about him. He breathed in your faded perfume and relentless devotion, and he did not stir for a very long time.

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## Chapter 47: Protegga il giusto cielo

**Author's Notes:** i was 100% certain that the panic of luna almost being shut down plus sherlock s3's realease date would jolt me into updating faster but then i had one paper after another to write *so* i'm sorry about that but ?? i can't believe how many people e-mailed me giving me their support and love for this story so i'm so so so grateful to have such wonderful people reading this ;w; back when i thought these chapters would only be 1k long each (this one alone was 4.5...) and the story wouldn't go over 30 chapters, i thought i'd have months for a hiatus. it looks like there won't be too much of a cliffhanger...

...on that note, for those who asked for this story via e-mail, i did mean it when i said i hadn't proofread anything, so that means i didn't open up the document to realize that i never erased that rather extensive treatise about sherlock masturbating in karachi. so i'm .... i'm really sorry about that i really should have been professional and made sure i cut that out ............... so if you got it by accident i guess ........... i don't know what to say ..............................

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It was amazing how often your co-workers could surprise you. Namely, you were surprised about how idiotic they could be while pretending to be mature adults.

The whispers started first. It was like being back in school. You could only clutch your umbrella tighter and keep walking with your head held high and a bitchy stare in your eyes. They couldn't gossip within your fiancé's earshot, so they'd have to settle for you, because rumors were definitely the priority in the face of the rescue of two kidnapped children.

*You hear what Sally's been saying about Holmes?*

*Hasn't everyone?*

*I wonder how she's taking it.*

*How long do you think that he's been lying to her…?*

There was a time and a place to let loose a flurry of teeth-breaking punches and cruelly-placed kicks. You knew that. Your workplace was not one of them, even though, ironically, that was where you most needed to let loose in an ultra-violent cathartic smackdown. If you were ensured a job elsewhere, you would have undoubtedly left the establishment with blood on your knuckles. But for now, you had to endure the verbal abuse of your husband-to-be.

It hadn't taken long for people to start talking, and that's what bothered you the most. It made no sense for you. Everything Sherlock Holmes had done, and their belief was shaken so easily! How many cases had he solved? How many irritating little facts and tidbits about a stranger had he deduced out of nowhere? And if it hadn't been for him, those two children would have never come home! But, no! Doubt was grown so easily in the minds of others!

You had nothing to do with the investigation, though the bitching in the office allowed you to piece together a good idea of what happened. Sherlock Holmes had been fantastic as usual, but he was fantastic at the wrong time. He had been balancing precariously on the opinions of others forever, but it wasn't until the abduction case that he had anything to lose.

You assumed that Sherlock needed no reassurance about your loyalty towards him. You were behind him totally, completely, wholeheartedly. You could feel it deep within your soul, so much so that the very thought of his potential guilt was abhorrent to you. But it felt as if the very lava of Hell was boiling in your chest as your co-workers yammered on about their small-minded theories in regards to a man they didn't bother to know at all.

On the fateful night of his attempted arrest, an angel came to you in an unlikely form: namely, that of Adam Coveney, who ambushed you as you locked your door and got ready to go home for the night. He came up behind you so silently that you nearly screamed when you noticed his presence.

"What?" you snapped. You had been on the breaking point ever since Sally had shot you a look and said that she was suspicious of Sherlock. You weren't about to take any abuse from the homewrecking slime that hadn't left you alone before. You weighed out your options. You supposed that, if you were to be fired, it'd be fine if Coveney's injuries were the catalyst.

But his eyes had a surprising honesty to them, in contrast to his usual douche bag attempted-charm. "Hey, can I talk to you for a quick moment?"

Polite as ever, you said, "I don't want to talk to you about anything."

"C'mon, please? It's about Sherlock."

You whirled around to face him and jabbed a finger into his chest. Your eyes burned like a hellhound's and every word you spat out came with an ounce of venom. "I know what you all have been talking about. Saying that Sherlock Holmes, who will be my *husband*, is a fake. A *liar.* I don't want to discuss anything with you. Do you get that?"

"That's not right!" he protested, shaking his head. "I'm not talking about that. I think Holmes is legit. 100% on his side, mate."

You relaxed, just a bit. "You think so?"

"Yeah. Our very first meeting, he deduced that I wear lady's undergarments as a pastime. I wasn't even wearing any that day. I knew he had to be for real."

You stared at him for a moment, blinking, wordless, almost waiting for him to break out a punch line. But he seemed sincere and honest about it as well as unapologetic, so you shrugged. With everything you'd seen, you decided that it was actually the most pleasant thing you'd discovered for the last few months and you wholeheartedly supported his hobbies.

"I just wanted to tell you–Sally went to Lestrade about Holmes," Coveney went on, looking a bit troubled, as if he were feeling guilty about ratting out a classmate to the schoolmarm. "With Anderson. Saying that she had proof that he was a fake. I'm not sure, but I think that they might arrest him."

"What!" A frost swept over your entire body and your heart hammered against your chest. "They can't do that–that's illegal! Where's the proof?"

"I have no idea. But it's the police. They can think of something. I just wanted to warn you–"

"My God! I never thought I'd say this, but thank you, Coveney. I owe you one, honestly. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have policemen to bitch out…"

You couldn't get to 221B fast enough. You tried to call ahead, but you were already on the street waving down a taxi when you realized you left your phone at the office. The cab driver that took you over didn't even make you pay, what with the way that you flew into the taxi ranting and raving and bitching like you were going to set the world on fire with your own two hands. By the grace of God, you managed to get to 221B between police visits, and when you burst into the flat you were greeted by an incredibly anxious mood and a cloud hanging over everyone there.

"What's the matter?" you barked. "Where are Lestrade and Donovan? Have they shown up yet? God help me, I'm going to smack that woman so hard she's going to go back in *time.*"

"You just missed them," John replied. "But they'll be back soon and they'll have the law with them."

He looked stressed. So did your fiancé, who remained silent. Deep in thought, not that he didn't have a good reason to be. From across the room you could feel the tumult of his emotions, the storm of anxiety and apprehension and frustration that he was only too good at suppressing. You went over to where he was sitting and stood over him. It was a sort of motion that he did all the time to you, when you were upset with him but were too cowardly to face him directly, except now it was he who couldn't look you in the eyes.

"Talk to me," you said, keeping your voice low and calm. For you, it was a surprise that there'd ever be a situation where you'd be the steadying anchor between the two of you. Now that the moment had come, you were determined to support him. "Tell me what I can do for you."

Sherlock looked up at you but found nothing to say. What a wonder you were–what a strange woman! At such an hour, you couldn't bear to wander around with the commoners. Even in the face of his disgrace, you were so constant and loyal that you practically defied his expectations of humanity. Briefly, he wondered what it would be like if he were an average man. That way, he could bury his face in your hair and wait for the danger to pass. Perhaps that would be the one, sole, solitary benefit to lowering himself to that group. But he was not an average man, which was a blessing, seeing as how he was not going up against an average man. And if you happened to accidentally get in the middle of it all…

No! He couldn't drag you into it. He wouldn't. It was your own fault for not knowing your limits! You'd be on your knees, crawling on the ground, bloody and torn, and you'd still look up at him with blackened eyes and ask what you could do for him! Who had given you to him? Who had wanted you to treat him this way, to constantly support him and help him and still give more? Who had wanted him to feel such disgusting pleasure at the thought of your presence, and to want so desperately to keep you close by? It had been so much easier when he hadn't cared about you or John or anybody! That way he wouldn't have to think twice about doing anything!

His gaze dropped and he stared back down at the desk. He told you, "I want you to stay away from me for a while."

Without seeing it, Sherlock could sense your gaze. He could *feel* the intensity of it, the heat that rivaled the fires of Pompeii. You said, as eloquently as you could in the presence of the presumably delicate John Watson, "What the fuck do you mean by that?"

He didn't look up at you. "You're going to get in the way of whatever I do."

Those words came from his mouth so easily! He wondered if there was any sincerity behind him, but he doubted it. Somewhere in the mechanisms of his heart, he had adjusted some function to ensure that he avoided saying anything that might hurt your feelings.

But you weren't hurt. In fact, you were even more enraged at the sound of it, like a bull suddenly surrounded by red flags. The thought of Sherlock going up against trouble alone didn't make you worried, it made you pissed. You quickly gave up your attempts at being a calm, steady anchor.

"What an idiot I'm talking to! This surpasses 'wow'! I'll have to think of another interjection. 'Double-wow!'"

He fidgeted. "You're distracting me."

"Like fuck I fucking *am*," you retorted, devolving (into Malcolm Tucker, apparently) as you stalked forward. You pinned him with your gaze so that he couldn't hope to get work done even if he tried. You had managed to stay relatively calm when you'd fought before, but this was different. This was practically an affront to you, personally!

"Do you realize what marriage even *is*? It means not abandoning one another just because some fucking situation goes to hell. I don't care if it's the police or Moriarty or whoever's up against you next, Sherlock, I'm not going to leave because you're scared of something. Don't give me that look, I *know* you are, you don't get snippy with me unless you are. Are you scared over *me*? Is that it? Is that honestly what I'm dealing with?"

Sherlock said nothing, which made you certain that you were right. Stunned by his sudden lack of speech, you felt obligated to continue. "Do you think I'm not worried, Sherlock? I'm just as concerned over this as you are. But I want to help you with it. I'm not giving up, because it's about you. Ask me anything and I'll do it, all right? But you can't just pretend like I'm going to sit at home, making tea, expecting you to go through all of this on your own. Don't you understand that?"

Silence. Your heart began to throb, painfully.

"Sherlock, at least tell me… At least let me know that you understand why I can't let you go through it on your own."

He was silent because, while he understood it, he couldn't possibly put it into words. He could hardly fathom how you could just be so *good*, how you could see him as both the diving bell and the butterfly! What sort of person could be so selfless towards others without knowing what their own fate would be? What a wonder that you could be insecure and charitable at the same time!

"So you don't believe it?" he asked, trying to keep his tone terse as he dropped his gaze.

"What? Believe what?"

"What they're saying." A pause and a very slight fidget. He still couldn't look at you properly. "About me."

"Oh, that load of garbage?" You scoffed and threw your head back, momentarily resembling the righteous goddesses of old. "It's so ridiculous to me–I could never believe it in the first place! People will believe anything these days. Sherlock, I trust you with my life. You know that, don't you?"

He did know that. That's why he was so apprehensive in the first place. He had your life in his hands and only now did he begin to wonder if he could protect it. You were tough and you could handle things on your own, he knew that, but Moriarty existed on a separate plane of danger and he was not about to leave you exposed.

"I'm sorry," he said after a long while, and finally he stood to press a kiss to your mouth. You were surprised by it: he preferred to remain at least somewhat detached from you when in John's presence so as to not seem like "the idiotic couples who trade clothing and take pictures of themselves when nothing interesting happens." But the most surprising thing to you was that he actually apologized, and sincerely, and with such a flat tone to it that you knew he was no longer trying to hide his anxiety over the coming events.

"Meet me at the lab," he told you. "I'll be there in a little while."

"What! You can't send me away. The police will be here any minute! I'm not going to let them arrest you!"

He knew that, too. He had always been quietly proud of your aggression towards his aggressors, though he wasn't certain that you'd be able to hold your own against every police officer he'd ever made an idiot out of. Besides, your job was on the line, and he would sorely miss it if he was no longer able to screw you on your desk.

"They can't arrest you, hey," you protested, shaking his arm a little bit. "They don't have any evidence, do they?"

"They have their emotions, and that's apparently good enough in these days of weak-minded individuals running around with handcuffs." Sherlock tried to calm you as he usually did, by stiffly patting you on the head. "Go to the lab. I'll need you to do something for me."

"Like what?"

It was beneath him to be polite and courteous with you, though you didn't mind, since you appreciated the fact that he let you know when he was impatient and needed something done. But he really did mean it when he said in a strange tone: "–Please?"

You gave him a look. "That's a rare word for you." But your heart really did feel strange, and the insistent need to make him feel better made you say, "Ah, fine. When you will be there?"

"I'm not sure. You know how long these things take, when idiots are involved."

"All right, all right. But I have to go back to work for a minute. I left my phone there, but I'll run right to the lab when I can."

You gave him another kiss and then ran out, hailing another cab by practically stepping out in front of it so that it'd brake. Your mind was racing, spinning faster than the tires beneath you. *Sherlock is in trouble.* But when wasn't he? Ever since you'd met him, he was always in one dangerous situation or another! *But not like this.* Well, you figured… *And Sherlock Holmes is in danger, but you can't do anything for him.*

You closed your eyes. *No.* You couldn't start thinking like that. Sherlock needed your help, not your panic, even if you assumed that he didn't need a being of lower intelligence to be offering assistance. You thought of the frenzied worry that had overtaken you when he was threatened in New York, and you knew that you wouldn't let him be taken from you.

What a strange world we live in–all poets can attest to that! When you were younger, you'd imagined yourself growing up to marry some average man who wore big cardigans and fell asleep in front of the TV, or maybe you'd never find a husband and you'd spend your days at safe tropical holiday destinations. Never had you imagined that you'd be almost-married to one of the smartest men in the world, racing around to help him defeat an ultra-criminal. You had once thought yourself to be of average intelligence and soul, but you had already proven yourself to be formidable in mind, body, and spirit. You had fundamentally changed and that much was obvious. Your posture, your gaze, the way you held your head as you walked… You were sure that someone who had met you before would certainly never recognize you now. And there you were in the back of a cab, clutching the worn leather seats as you unknowingly prepared yourself for one of the greatest events in your life with Sherlock Holmes.

This time you made sure to toss some money at the driver before you raced out to your work. Little did you know that a force had already been dispatched to arrest Sherlock, as if a whole squad was needed to go up against a man whose only threat to the world was his lousy attitude. Had you known, you would have turned around and chased them to 221B. But you didn't know, and that was why you were able to be ambushed by your co-workers.

You exited your office, phone in your purse, when you noticed that they were standing around your office. There was only about a dozen of them, as it was late in the evening, but the insolent looks of sympathy on their faces made you feel as if you were going up against an entire army of idiots.

"Have you heard?" one of them asked.

Your throat felt dry. "What, about them trying to arrest my fiancé? I believe I did hear."

(And they were indeed *trying*. At that exact moment, Sherlock had turned to flee with his "hostage" in tow)

"We just wanted to know if you were okay," another one said. "We know it must be tough to swallow."

"Nothing's wrong," you snapped, pressing yourself to the door as if they were advancing. "They're not going to find anything. Sherlock Holmes is an innocent man."

The group exchanged looks with one another, and you felt your heart drop to your stomach as you read their gazes. It was such a disgusting expression, one you never thought you'd stoop to receiving. *Pity.* They thought you really had been duped by the great liar, Sherlock Holmes. You were just some poor office worker, callously used and then thrown aside by a man looking for a cover.

"I know it's a lot to take in," the first one told you. "He fooled all of us, you know."

Your voice rose, echoing off the bland hallway walls. "Shut up!" You wished that you could sound confident, cool, manly. Instead your voice felt shrill and panicky to you, like some person deep in denial, which was exactly the opposite of what you needed to sound like. You could feel your voice break a bit, wobbling dangerously as you became childishly upset. "None of you know anything. Do you hear me? He's not a fake!"

They exchanged that look again and you felt hot, disobedient tears pricking at your eyes. It would be too obvious if you wiped them away, so you shook your head and said once more, louder, insistently: "He's not a *fake*!"

How small you sounded out there in the hallway, cornered by your peers! As if the entire world were watching you on stage while you barely knew your lines. You pushed past them all and ran back out, going to Saint Bartholomew's on foot since you were out of money. Tears rolled freely down your face, and they sat cold on your cheeks as you kept running. Even the ground beneath you seemed foreign and unfamiliar. You were crying because you felt alone, so *alone*, nobody trusting what you knew to be absolute truth. You tried to push it all to the back of your mind, because your husband-to-be was more important than all of it.

By the time you made it there, stopping a minute during your run to scream into your sleeve, Sherlock was already there. The place was empty except for Molly, who passed you with an extraordinarily pale face and a shaky voice when she wished you good-night. You found Sherlock in the lab and you immediately rushed to him.

You couldn't possibly tell him what your co-workers had done. He'd either blow it off as actions indicative of lower-class brain owners, or, in the worst case, he'd wonder if you were bringing it up because you were beginning to doubt him. Either way, you couldn't possibly let him see your red eyes or hear the cracks in your voice, so you were careful when you said, "What's the matter? What happened?"

"It's a very long story," he said, "and not one worth boring you with."

He sounded exhausted and, unless you'd gone insane in that brief space of time, heartbroken. Perhaps not heartbroken in the way that you expressed your grief, in open and unapologetically human ways, but he did sound different to you. He would never let himself break down in front of you and you knew that, but you knew him well enough to know when his voice sounded hollow and empty.

You pressed yourself into him, your entire body against his as you hugged him. You weren't sure who you were comforting, since he never asked for the comfort that you gave him anyway, but you assured yourself that it was a 50-50 sort of deal. A reminder flashed through your head and you said, "The police. They wouldn't just let you walk, would they? Tell me, what happened?"

"It's very simple," he said, fiddling with your hair as he fell deep into thought. "They tried to arrest me."

"What! What's *tried*?"

"I may or may not have fled the scene with a hostage."

"Oh, would you stop bullying John so much?"

With you in such a position, he couldn't form his usual thinking pose. Of course, he wasn't about to move you, so he allowed himself the rare affection that dumber people appreciated and he rested his chin on the top of your head.

"I have to stay here for the night," he told you. "The police are bound to be a bit resentful of my threatening them with a gun."

"You did *what*?" You shook your head. You never thought that *that* would be of lowest importance in any situation, but this *was* Sherlock Holmes. "Ah, never mind. And no *way*. You can come sleep with me tonight."

"That's unnecessary. It would be ridiculous to put you in any danger of being arrested."

Feeling grumpy, you pulled away from him and tangled your fingers in his hair so that you could drag him down and slam his forehead against yours. Naturally, that was one of the poses you favored highly, since it meant that he couldn't possibly look away from you.

"You can't act like what I offer for you is charity. Don't you realize that?" you harrumphed. "What I do for you, I do because I love you. If you're going to have to… face Moriarty soon, do you think that you want to do that after sleeping on some filthy floor? Besides, you wanted me at the lab, right? And you probably said that so I wouldn't get in trouble with the police. Well, I'm here, so at least make me a little useful to you."

"But, you…"

You had a certain look in your eyes that ended all petty arguments, and he could see it as you shook your head. "No, I'm not going to argue. Look, I once smuggled a whole motorbike out of my uncle's house once. I think I can manage to get you into my flat without any fuss… Besides, all the art students are out getting drunk. Nobody's home. Now, come on. I feel like we haven't held hands in ages."

Apparently your case was compelling enough, since Sherlock followed you along without too much complaining (though, I said, not *too much*). But his complaints were for naught. True to your word, you smuggled him over to your flat with not a soul in London so much as giving him a second glance.

Your bed really was good for him, and he did appreciate it, if his body language was any indication. And by body language I mean the way his body murmured and sighed against yours as he pushed inside of you. The way he made love to you was desperate, insistent, almost needy, and you gave him everything that he wanted. You didn't know then that the bed where you first had sex with him would also be the last place you'd sleep with him for years. You only knew the feel of him against you, the way that he was trying to devour you and memorize the sight and shape and taste of you. No one had ever slept with you as if it were the last time, and so you weren't sure why you were feeling so desperate to hold him once he pulled away from you.

He did let you hold him. In fact, it was one of the few times he reciprocated such affection in the waking world. There was a very slight trembling to him that you noticed after the bout of sex, but you said nothing, and for months afterward you would be bothered by the fact that you never asked him about it. Or maybe you were trying not to believe that, somewhere within the vastness of him, he too was afflicted by tears.

"I love you," he said, his voice heavy with exhaustion. "So much. I hope you know that…"

You pressed a kiss to his shoulder. He had to be tired if he was talking to you like that, his strange soft words contrasting with the anxiety in his tone. "I love you, too, but you sound so strange when you say that. People should only talk like that when there's not much time left, Sherlock. But we both have lots of time ahead of us, so don't worry… Get some sleep."

You had been trapped in a lift with a bald woman once, one who claimed to be a fortune teller. She spoke mostly in German and you could only pick out certain words she said, and they didn't make sense to you, so you forgot about most of them. But you did remember asking her, out of some paranoia about the future: "What should I be wary about? I mean, what do I have to prepare myself for?"

She had only answered, "*Die kommenden Tage.*" You were certain that you had a lot of time to wait. But the coming days were already upon you and you were running blind in their midst, waiting for the final one to fall.

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## Chapter 48: Bimba, Bimba, non piangere

**Author's Notes:** my crack team of fanfiction quality analysts (i.e. kelly) told me to avoid actually doing reichenbach and i thought it was actually a good idea since it's redundant/obsolete now that the poorly-spaced new episodes are out (since it's silly to be sad considering how gr9 those episodes were) and i just sort of want to keep moving into the new material

and i'm already writing the next chapter so it might take slightly less than two years to complete so nobody panic

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*Can you hear me?*

*Miss, can you hear me?*

*…don't think that she…*

*Not a good place for… No, I think she saw him jump.*

*Yeah. Shock like that could make any girl faint.*

*Can you hear me?*

*I think she's woken up.*

…
*…yes, she's all right now.*

The sound of silverware falling on the ground made you lurch forward. Your heart was a bird in your chest, fluttering and panicking to get out of its cage. It had been two years since the day that you had seen your fiancé commit suicide, and it had been two years since they had refused to let you see the body of the man that you were going to marry. The first part was enough to make anyone give you soft pats of sympathy, but the second part is what aroused the conspiracy of a man you had once smacked across the head with a stapler.

“So go over it carefully with me,” Anderson said, leaning forward eagerly as he tried to smooth his beard over. “They didn't want you to see the body.”

You felt tired. The scene that the two of you set was uncomfortably like that of a date, and you did your best to turn away from him to express the distance between you and him. You had never thought that you would want to spend any amount of your free time with him, but things had changed. He had become obsessed over your dead fiancé and you could only think, *too late*. What a world we live in, when the only thing we can think of saying in such a situation is *too late*!

“I didn't say they didn't *want* me to see it, I said they wouldn't *let* me,” you replied, feeling frustrated in doing something so simple as repeat your statement.

“Did they not believe that you were his fiancée?”

“Oh, no, they knew. I was in some papers even though I sort of bullied those reporters. I just wasn't allowed for some reason. They told me that it was because the body was in too bad of a shape, and they didn't want me to get upset.”

He stopped to take careful notes on a scrap of paper. “And why would they think you'd get upset? Besides the obvious, of course. But that's hardly a reason to conceal a corpse.”

You let out a snort of derision. “I wasn't exactly in top shape, Anderson. I fainted, remember? Not for too long, but for long enough for them to pigeonhole me as some screaming widow ready to through herself onto the funeral pyre.”

You insisted that you'd only fainted in the first place out of fatigue. And that was mostly true. You'd slept restlessly that night despite the fact you'd been sedated by sex for a short while. The thought of Sherlock's possible death was so abhorrent to you that your subconscious obsessed over it. Twice you woke up believing that he was dead already. As it would turn out, you were just a little ahead of schedule…

After Anderson had degraded into his usual state, after it was all over and done with, he had frequently invited you to lunch. Not comprehending, you'd assumed that he was trying to get with you, since you were available. (On the other hand, the wife-snatching Coveney hadn't bothered with a single soft word since you took your engagement ring off) But it quickly became apparent that he was stricken by the belief that Sherlock Holmes was alive and living under the ocean somewhere, so you said something you'd thought you never would: “I don't know, Anderson… Maybe we *should* hang out sometime.”

Before you'd even ordered your food, he'd accused you of aiding and abetting Sherlock in his “faked death” and he demanded to know where Sherlock was. The waitress had returned in the midst of his tirade and you had to stomp on his foot to keep him quiet. When she was gone, you'd nearly stabbed him with your half-washed fork.

“You've really gone mad, haven't you?” you'd hissed. “Oh, yes, Anderson, of *course* I helped Sherlock fake his death! His living with me right now back at my flat. You want to go see him?”

“Really?” he'd replied, eager.

“Are you fucking *joking*? He's *dead!*” You'd raised your voice too high and some people glanced at you with shock and irritation at Anderson for apparently harassing you. Humiliation washed over you. Lowering your voice back to a hiss, you'd said, “Did you forget the condition I was in after the suicide?”

“*No*, but…”

“But *what*?”

“You did seem a little… *odd.*”

“Of course I seemed *odd*, I was *grieving.* Or did you miss the part about me missing work for a week? I was in such a state, Lestrade didn't even want me to come through the front door!”

“But isn't that just a *bit* curious? *Only* a week, after your longtime fiancé jumps to his death?”

You'd scoffed. “If he were alive, he'd tease me worse if I rolled up into a ball of grief for three months in mourning. But I was miserable, Anderson. And no, he's dead, so don't float that question by me again.”

In a way, you were still despondent. Not that you didn't have a reason to be. It's not that you were carrying a torch for him–you knew that he was dead–but it was still impossible to simply recover quickly after the passing of such a man. You'd only seen one or two men in the years after the incident, but Sherlock was a hard act to follow and you knew that you needed time alone to focus on your work and get your mind off of your troubles. But you had forgotten how *alone* felt and you were certain it had never been like this.

Maybe some explanation over your fiancé's death would have made matters just a little better, if only so that other people wouldn't tip-toe around you with the worry that you blamed yourself for all of it. But there were no conclusions! You never got any answers, any finality, any reason. Your fiancé had told you that he loved you and the next day he had jumped off the roof of a building. You knew that suicide was usually an impulsive deal, but you couldn't believe that Sherlock Holmes, who talked at such great length about how he'd outlive the pedestrians around him, would suddenly opt to kill himself. And nothing, *nothing* could convince you that he was a fake.

Anderson, finally convinced that you really didn't have any part in his faked death, moved onto another subject. If you were not there to assist him in his faked death, then you could at least be useful in describing what you saw that day. You drifted off as you told him that they'd barred you from seeing Sherlock's body, and you were awakened by–the sound of silverware hitting the floor and Anderson asking you to clarify.

“Where were we?” you asked, feeling dazed.

“Widow, funeral pyre,” Anderson replied, having flipped through your notes in your sudden silence.

“All right, I seem to recall now.”

“But I need you start from the *beginning.*”

You let out a snort. “How far back do you want to go, Anderson? Let's see… Sherlock and I were all loved-up in bed together…”

“No, no, that's, uh, fine. Just start wherever you want.”

All right, yes–now–where was it? Where had you been?

Oh, yes: there.

It had been right before Sherlock had left you to go back to Bart's. The worst part was that you couldn't remember anything special about the last time you'd seen him. Your nightmares seemed so groundless in the light of the real world, and you couldn't possibly suspect that Sherlock was going to be ripped away from you in a matter of hours. You'd kissed him and said, “What do you need me to do?”

“I need you to not die. I don't know who of Moriarty's men might be after you.”

“Oh, please. Why would they be after me if you're the important target today?”

“You *know* why.”

Well–yes. Due to some inexplicable force of nature, you were precious to Sherlock Holmes and therefore people thought that they could use you. Stanford Stanley had not been the first time and he would definitely not be the last. But at the same time, you couldn't stand to let him do everything by himself!

“Don't give me that look,” he snapped, adjusting your coat collar for you. “Just be rational and stay away from wherever I am. It would be slightly more painful for me if you died than if you were ordinary and quiet for a day.”

“I appreciate the sentiment, sweetheart. Now be *careful.* I'll see you soon.”

And that was the last you'd seen of him. In a way, that was how you knew that he hadn't faked his death. If he had, he would have asked you to do something for him! Something, anything! You had told him time and time again that you would have done anything to help him. And just what would he gain from faking his death with you, anyway?! What, did he not think that you could keep a secret? That you'd betray him? Or maybe he just wanted to fuck with you some more for *scientific validity* or something–

“There's no need to get upset,” Anderson said, interrupting your torrid thoughts as you squirmed in your seat. (What kind of a person tells someone else not to get upset when they're doing just fine?! The worst kind of people!) “What happened after your left your flat?”

What could you say? You flew east, John flew west, and Sherlock flew over the cuckoo's nest. You'd often wished that the details before it could have been more interesting than they were. In truth, there was only a matter of hours between your waking and Sherlock's death. You spent that time running around London, trying to find John, who was accidentally evading you. At the same time, you were accidentally evading the girl who was supposed to be tailing you. You had dropped your phone on the sidewalk and it had cracked, leaving your communication lines broken at the worst possible time. (Not that your phone wouldn't have just broken anyway, when you'd fainted so embarrassingly) You felt helpless and alone, though not as alone as you'd feel later!

You returned to 221B for Mrs. Hudson to tell you that John had just left, although he didn't say where to. Frustrated, you broke your one rule for the day and ran back to St. Bart's, where you knew Sherlock was waiting. Of course, you expected him to be there waiting for you, maybe with a snippy word when he realized that you'd disobeyed him. That would be the worst of it, nothing more. Hopefully the business would be all sorted out by then… Moriarty would be arrested and everything would be all right…

You had seen him. You had seen him without him expecting that. Had he known that you were there, it might have been enough to make even him hesitate for an extra second or two. There were many things that he'd put you through–infiltrating vicious drug cartels, or having nothing but an electrical cord to defend yourself with against an axe murderer, or being trapped in a room slowly filling up with water–but he'd never put you through *that*. In fact, it was the last thing he'd wanted you to see… He'd expected you to be far away, so that you could get the message in a cold and detached manner…

But of course, few things go as planned, even if you're Sherlock Holmes. It would turn out that you were too far away to see what was actually going on with his faked death, but at the time, all you could see was your fiancé standing at a peculiar place to make a call. What you remembered saying was, "What's Sherlock doing on the roof?" to no one in particular. No one around you had noticed you. But they did notice you when you watched Sherlock jump and you made a fall of your own.

"You fainted right on the pavement?" Anderson repeated, astonished.

"What? Isn't that what I said?"

"Well, it's just…" He shrugged a little. "You just don't really seem the type."

"It wasn't exactly by choice. I told you, I was worn ragged. My knees weren't exactly willing to cooperate with all the stress."

"So you must have hit your head when you fell."

"I *was* caught. I'll have you know that the ground rushed up very quickly to catch me."

"But you were disoriented?" He nodded quickly. "So you might have forgotten some important details, right?"

"What are the important details I'm missing? *Suicide of fake genius*. I think I summed up my experience pretty well. Unless you want me to spend an hour talking about my *feelings*, but that seems a little intimate."

"I mean–you don't remember a bungee cord or anything? Sherlock hit the ground… He didn't crash through a window or anything?"

You shot him a disgusted look. "Is suicide really a joke to you? The saddest thing is, he wasn't even the only person to kill himself that day. Apparently some girl drowned herself in a pool. Nobody even knows who she is. Are you going to make a joke about that, huh? Is she faking her death, too?"

"This is the furthest thing from a joke to me! Sherlock Holmes is alive, I just need to figure out how he did it! As I was saying, I think he had a harness attached to him…"

You would have been speechless, but you still had the faculties to tell him that he was an idiot. "Anderson, what are you even *on*? It must be bloody wonderful."

"It's my *theory*, and I'll have you know that I put it together very meticulously! Here, let me walk you through it–"

Thankfully, you had finished your food, so you were through with the afternoon's commitment. "Um, maybe some other time, Anderson. I don't think that this topic makes my stomach feel well. I really must be going."

"You should come to one of our meetings!" Anderson called after you as you left. "We'd love to have you!"

You had to admit that it was sort of nice for him to invite you, but the last thing you needed was a headache from the glare of the sunlight that glinted off of his tinfoil cap. Your husband was dead and all you needed was a little self-care, and for you that usually meant that you were going to lounge around and listen to some opera music until your head cleared.

This time, though, you had something planned. At the insistence of John's new girlfriend, a woman who seemed to be sent from the heavens to land in the midst of the chaos that was John Watson's life, you had decided to take a trip to Sweden for a little while.

"It's been ages since you've taken a holiday," Mary had insisted, giving you a comforting pat. "You're too young to stay unhappy! Spoil yourself and put yourself first once in a while!"

At the time, her advice sounded great. It was true that you'd been spending too much time focused on work after Sherlock had died. You hadn't had too much else that you'd wanted to do, and you didn't have time to relax until you were home. Fresh air and a nice Swedish landscape would do you some good and you knew it.

Unfortunately, the timing would be awful, but you wouldn't know that until you got back. The first time, when Sherlock had jumped, you had arrived too early. This time, you would return too late, instead spending your time far away from the return of Sherlock Holmes. …But, as I said, you wouldn't know that until it was too late!

John was there to see you off as you prepared to board the plane, and you gave him a hug good-bye before you picked your things up to leave. It was nice to see him, which was why you did it frequently. It was good to be around someone who had experienced Sherlock as much as you had and who had felt the blow of his death just as you had. In his life Sherlock had rebuked you for spoiling the doctor too much, and in the wake of his death, you didn't see any reason to lessen the spoiling. In a way you felt that John needed comfort more than you did, but then, you knew that he and your fiancé made up their own breed of soul mates.

"Take it easy," you advised him with a smile. "And good luck with what you have planned."

He laughed a little nervously. "Wh-What's that supposed to mean?"

"What, do I look like an idiot? You're going to propose to Mary, aren't you?"

"Don't say that so loud!" he hissed, even though no one was around you but strangers. "How… *How* do you know that?!"

"But are you really going to keep… *that*…?" You gestured around your mouth, staring at his mustache. Maybe it was just the fact that you were used to him being clean-shaven, but you could hardly recognize him with it. "I mean, are you going to shave it off for the proposal?"

"I don't understand *how* you know! Who *told* you?"

You laughed, enjoying the fluster that he was in. "It's not like I haven't been proposed to before, John. I know what men are like before it all happens…"

You said it without really thinking about it, and when you were finished you immediately wanted to reel those words back in. The last thing you wanted was to look like the sort of poor lady who wistfully reminisced about long-dead memories because she was lonely. Before he could say anything, you flapped a hand and said, "Oh, don't give me those big, sad eyes. It was just a piece of history, right? Now, I mean it. Take it *easy.*"

"You too. I'll see you when you get back!"

You boarded the plane and relaxed against the seat, sighing and closing your eyes as you leaned back. The last time you'd been on a plane, you'd been returning from New York City with Sherlock Holmes in tow… Oh, Jesus Christ! Thinking about him *again*, all because Anderson had to prod and pry and ask you about him! Oh, naturally…! Well, you were on holiday and you could finally take your mind off of the damned place that was London!

And, as these things go, it was on your holiday that Sherlock Holmes decided to make his fateful return on the eve of John Watson's attempted proposal. You were still in Sweden then, preparing to return home. So you missed the big news of his return, and you stayed away from electronics, so you missed all the big fuss that was on the Internet. No, Sherlock would have to personally tell you about the fact that he wasn't dead, and it would be his turn to deal with the consequences of his actions!

But, until that day when you'd return to London, you fitted yourself more comfortably into your seat and closed your eyes. The memories of that June day stirred up once more, and behind your eyes you could see him jump from the roof a hundred times over. You don't remember screaming but you remember hitting the ground like a graceless lump until some passersby had the decency to scoop you up and rock you back and forth like a newborn.

*Miss, are you all right? Can you hear me? (Yes, she's conscious! Get somebody!) Ma'am, it's fine now. It's all over. It's going to be all right now.*

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## Chapter 49: Ah! M’ha scordata?

**Author's Notes:** Fun fact corner:

1) I wasn't lying when I said that I had a lot of the chapter written when I updated last time (forever ago, sob), but I didn't want to leave it on a cliffhanger (which would be dumb) so I just merged it in with what I was writing next

2) which brought it up to nearly 6k which I promised myself I wouldn't do again but idk

3) this is one of the few times the chapter title is referenced in the chapter (which is obvious, I know)

4) I do realize that I don't have a ribbon for this story anymore. They go away if you edit the story information as I did (I had to edit the warnings). I could ask a mod to put it back up but I'm 100% bad at asking people for things so I guess we're gonna roll with it

5) Funnest fact: the title of this entire fanfiction is a reference to the French film A Very Long Engagement, which is also a clever double entendre (and what I'd watched specifically for Gaspard Ulliel, not realizing that he was barely in it for the very long movie but it was good anyway). I realize that I started writing this story back in 2012, and now, both in-universe and meta, this is, indeed, a very long engagement ........

umu thanks to **ohlawdy** for doing unintentional "line production" (you readers are all so clever though I'm jealous)

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The sound of a voice woke you, and, drowsy, you bungled your way out of your seat to find your luggage. You missed your holiday-time already, not really ready to replace Sweden with the dreary clouds of London. Around you, some people were muttering about some sort of attempted terrorist attack, but your nap had made you irritable and bleary and you didn’t want to hear any of it. Everybody was trying to blow up the other guy… You couldn’t pay attention to who was who anymore!

You claimed your luggage, but everything feels heavier after a nap and the prospect of lugging your nonsense all the way out the door was daunting, so you decided to sit down for a moment until you felt ready enough to traverse the terminal.

About a hundred feet away from you were people waiting for their loved ones to get off their flights. Others were chauffeurs and others who evidently had no idea who exactly they were picking up, and held signs in front of them with names scribbled on them. You watched a few reunions happen: most were heartfelt and exuberant, others tearful and poignant, and some that were so bland that it seemed like routine. A pang of jealousy went through you, and you felt stupid at the thought of being sad that no one was around to greet you. *John and Mary are busy, though,* you knew, since you assumed that he’d already proposed. *Fran can’t take a day off of work, and neither can Lestrade, and for everyone else, well…* Well! It wasn’t too fun to hang around an almost-widow, you knew, and you scowled at the number of acquaintances you’d lost because they’d been unable to put up with the blue periods that had followed the death of the man you loved.

…But maybe you weren’t so friendless after all. Your gaze drifted back over to the chauffeurs with the names held out in front of them, and, impossibly, you saw your name written out on one of the signs in neat handwriting. *That’s impossible!* How common was your name, anyway? No one could possibly be waiting for *you,* but you read the sign ten more times, making sure that it wasn’t a result of some sleepy haze. Sure enough, that was *your* name on it.

You tried to look at the face of the man holding it, but found yourself unable. You were in a bad position to get a good look at his face due to all the crowds, but after a moment you stopped trying to look. Your eyes were fixed to the sign, the sight of your name scrawled out.

You knew that handwriting. You *knew* it. How many times had you written love notes to receive a reply back in that handwriting that was simply *Adequate* or *Needs less split infinitives*? How many times had you seen that sprawled out on a note on your nightstand, telling you what case your lover needed to attend to? So just what the hell was that handwriting doing *there*? It was supposed to be dead and gone, buried along with your fiancé. A fiancé whose casket you *watched* as it was lowered into the ground.

Slowly you stood and walked forward a few steps, your luggage dragging along, deadweight behind you. Your legs moved of their own accord as ice spread throughout your body. *It’s not how it seems,* you repeated over and over again. *You’re lying to yourself. It’s a lie. It’s a trick…*

But then you moved forward enough to where there was empty space between yourself and the line of waiting individuals. That left plenty of space for you to stand face-to-face with Sherlock Holmes.

He must have seen you earlier, and he was still, his eyes fixed on you. Waiting for you to make the first move, evidently. He was never one for sentimental reunions, after all. The sort of man who usually forgot when you left on holiday and made *you* apologize for worrying him when you came back. Therefore, Sherlock’s presence in the airport alone was enough to make you believe that he was not really your dead husband-to-be but rather some optical illusion brought on by fatigue.

But then he said, “You’ve been standing there for quite a while… I’m sure it’s been long enough for you to deduce the obvious.” And *that* more than convinced you that your eyes weren’t lying to you.

Your fingers were trembling, and you let your luggage fall to the floor. You couldn’t locate where your heart was: it was both in your stomach and in your throat at the same time. Still you could not find sufficient energy to move, which seemed to disquiet Sherlock further.

“Now you’ll create crowding,” he told you, almost as if he were scolding you. “Really, even John was quicker to react than this.”

“John was…” You stopped, fumbling for a reply. “John knows? How long have…?” You couldn’t even finish the sentence! Oh, what the fuck was even going on?!

Sherlock shrugged a bit, as if lost about where to start to explain where he’d been for so long. “I made my return a few days ago. You didn’t miss much, except for John nearly dying and my handling of a bomb beneath Parliament. Oh, but that can wait. What do they do in these situations? There’s a deal of running into outstretched arms, hugging, crying, the like…”

Like an actress remembering her lines after a heartbeat of forgetting, your feet picked up and you started to move towards him. True to his word, within a second you started running. That seemed unnecessary to him, since he wasn’t that far of a distance away from you. It all seemed to be happening so slowly… Would you really jump into his arms? People around him were giving you both fond looks, so maybe he was expected to stretch out his arms. But you were already upon him…

…and it seemed as though you had finally regained control of your hands, because they were wrapped around his neck as you tackled him to the floor. You choked him with such a vicious relish that you slammed his head against the floor over and over, yelling at him in tongues as the fond expressions around you quickly changed to horror and there were calls for security.

“You’ve been dead for *years*!” you spat at your incredibly bemused fiancé. “You are *dead*! I watched them *bury* you, I kissed your *coffin*!”

He struggled to speak, and for a moment you thought that he was about to apologize wholeheartedly to you, but he only said, “And don’t you feel silly now? Wasting all those tears on a mostly-empty coffin…”

“You… *You…!*”

Nearly depleted of oxygen, Sherlock still had enough love for you to just accept your fury, but he was still himself, and he couldn’t open his mouth and *not* be an asshole. “I’m sure you common folk use *tosser* at times like these…”

“I’m going to *kill* you! I will *murder* you!” you snarled, which was apparently not a good thing to shout in the middle of an airport, because right then security swooped down on you to separate the happy, reunited couple. You flailed helplessly in their arms, hissing and spitting and threatening Sherlock the whole way. It's a wonder why they didn’t handcuff you or tase you, considering you certainly looked like an evil harpy out to rip out Sherlock’s heart.

Which made it even more agonizing when they placed you in the same small room as him as they waited to take further action.

There were three chairs in the room, and, naturally, you sat in the one farthest from Sherlock. The latter cast sideways glances at you, wondering if you’d jump at him again, but you never did. That was the scariest part: your absolute silence. He almost preferred that violent rage of yours to that big, devouring silence of yours. He wanted to say something, but then again, his last attempts at alleviating the tension didn’t exactly work out as planned.

He turned his head a bit so that he could deduce you clearly. You knew his attentions and folded your arms like an irate schoolgirl and, to fit the part, childishly turned your entire body away from him. He didn’t see anything too alarming. You weighed about the same as when he’d seen you, which at least assured him that his absence hadn’t made you suffer one way or the other. To his relief, you looked healthy and stable (the latter not quite so much when you were throttling him on the floor), but he did notice one spectacular change.

He decided to break the silence with: “I can’t help but notice that…” He trailed off when you jerked your head around to shoot him a glare. Shrugging with an air of near-innocence, he said, “It’s just that I see… Well, a bit obvious that you’re not wearing your engagement ring anymore.”

The only thing stopping you from your outcry of rage and righteous indignation was the fact that it all got stuck in your throat and you only managed a look of wordless wrath. When you finally found your voice, you said, “You were *dead!*” And, for good measure: “*Ass!*”

“I don’t understand why you’re so upset. I *told* you as soon as I was able to. I was a bit caught up in a criminal network.”

You threw your hands up. “Well, that’s *great.* Oh, no, you’re right. I can really see why you couldn’t just pop by or slip me a note along the lines of, *oh, by the way, I’m not dead!* Last time I checked, the criminal network reads the notepad that I keep on my refrigerator, so thank God you didn’t leave me any clandestine messages *there.*”

“You weren’t the only one who believed I was dead,” Sherlock replied stiffly. “Of course, there *were* people who *knew,* but…”

*That* got you into a bluster. “What?! *Who*?”

“I can’t believe you all. John reacted the same way, right down to attempting to kill me in a public area…”

“Okay, *seriously*. Just how many people did you tell, before me?!”

He looked offended, as if he had any right to be! “Don’t be ridiculous. You were in Sweden. How was I supposed to drop in on you?”

“Like distance has stopped you from being obnoxious before!”

“Fair enough, but I did mention that I had a small matter of national security to deal with.”

“Fine, fine, I understand,” you grumbled. “But who else knew? That is, who else did you tell before me?”

“Only a handful of people, I *assure* you. John, of course…”

“John’s your soul mate, so he doesn’t count.”

He began to shift a bit in his seat, which was his form of squirming. “Molly knew beforehand, but *strictly* because of the logistics of the plan. Mycroft and… a few known associates also knew. But that was *unavoidable.* I needed them in order to carry out the attempted suicide… As for who I told recently, I…”

You were giving him a look, not of fury or rage this time, but of genuine hurt and betrayal. You opened your mouth to say something, but the door opened and in walked a disgruntled Lestrade. (The DI was evidently preparing for a future career in bailing out Sherlock Holmes and his associates) His lack of surprise at seeing Sherlock made you turn once more to the consulting detective.

“*Lestrade* knew before I did?!”

“And *he* didn’t throttle me,” Sherlock broke in.

“You give me *more* than enough cause to do it any other bloody day,” Lestrade retorted before turning to you. “What, you mean you really didn’t know? Even *Anderson* knew.”

“I was on holiday! Apparently one of the smartest men in the whole world is clueless about sending any sort of message or letter to let me know that he’s *alive!*”

The word “holiday” seemed to remind Lestrade that he was in an airport, and he remembered why he was there in the first place. “You do realize that I got a call saying that a trusted employee was found openly threatening murder to an ‘innocent man’ while choking him in full view of everyone? I’d find it hilarious if they weren’t quick to brand you a threat to national security. Which no one wants to be, considering the catastrophe that nearly happened the other day!”

“Oh, come off it,” you said, flapping a hand. “If they’re smart, they’ll just call it a lover’s quarrel. They don’t get enough of those these days.”

“Well, you’re damned lucky. The head of security is apparently a huge fan of our consulting detective here…”

“Good to see that even pedestrians can appreciate an advanced mind,” Sherlock replied brusquely.

“Nahh, I think he just likes your hat. Come on; I gave him a talking-to and he’s decided to let you both off with a warning, as long as he gets an *autograph* from Mister Holmes. Let’s go, and let’s not pull each other’s hair on the way out like a couple of schoolkids.”

You stood with an air of firm dignity and brushed your skirt off, walking out the door without so much as a glance towards Sherlock. To the latter’s surprise, Lestrade didn’t give you as much as a scolding look when you passed. He went out after you, walking beside you even though you weren’t exactly encouraging him.

“I can’t believe you!” he burst.

You looked over at him with a scowl. “Can’t believe *what*?”

“You…” He looked over his shoulder and lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “You and *Grant*?”

“It’s *Greg*, and what are you going on about? Yeah, he took me out as a dinner date when his wife bailed. We spent the whole time talking about sports, since you look so *curious*, but I didn’t think you’d mind since you were *dead*!”

Sherlock, surprisingly enough, looked about ready to give you a heart-to-heart when Lestrade finally caught up to the two of you, and your stony silence returned. Not that you didn’t have a reason to be pissed, even ignoring the obvious wedge between you and Sherlock. Someone had stolen the luggage you’d dropped, and though there wasn’t anything sensitive in them, you nevertheless lost a bunch of your clothes as well as whatever good mood you might have had for the day.

You wanted to just head home and lie about in bed for the whole day to process the information. But Sherlock begged (Sherlock-begging, which means asking you twice instead of just once) for you to come to 221B, and, needing a shower, you relented. There was no point in avoiding him forever, after all. He might have deceived you, true, but you had prayed endlessly for him to come back, and there he was!

Sherlock diligently waited for you to return, and return you did, clad in only a spare bathrobe.

“I should have gone to my flat first,” you grumbled, toweling off your hair further. “I forgot that I didn’t have a change of clothes.”

“It’s fine,” Sherlock assured you, staring at his laptop screen. “You’ve left enough articles of clothing over here in the past that you could potentially piece together an outfit.”

“Mrs. Hudson does *clean*, you know.”

“Oh, well… Perhaps I didn’t entirely think this through,” he said, to appease you.

“Hmph! Seems like a recurring theme.”

Now Sherlock turned to look at you, and there was a rare look of hurt in his eyes. “If you had gone back to your flat, what would you say would be the probability of you returning to me? It seemed more likely to me that you were intending to avoid me for a while, and I’ve had more than enough of a separation from you.”

You waited for your mind to process a reply, but you found none. Suddenly it occurred to you that Sherlock Holmes might not have exactly enjoyed his time spent apart from you. He hadn’t had to deal with *your* fake suicide, true, but he had to deal with miles and miles of separation between you and him, unable to alleviate your grief and suffering, forced to accept any paramours you’d moved on to, and absent from the moments of joy and surprise that you couldn’t share with him.

Though you still felt upset about the whole ordeal, you couldn’t help but want to go over to him and reunite with him in a way. He was looking away from you, and you knew that as long as you didn’t accept to being his fiancée again, he wouldn’t indulge himself with doing as he would when the two of you were engaged, and that included staring at the body he’d already memorized. That alone made you want to go over to him and sit in his lap, as you’d done time and time again.

“What are you looking at?” you asked, wanting a subject change, padding closer over to him to try and look over his shoulder at the screen.

Sherlock shifted uncomfortably, the fresh scent of you and your lack of clothing stirring up rather graphic images in his mind. “Oh, some idiot is begging for me to take his case. Hounding me ever since I made my return to London. A child… You know how cumbersome *their* issues are.”

“Take it,” you urged without really knowing why. “It wouldn’t kill you. Besides, I could poke around with it, see where I could help.”

“At most, it’s a–”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake!” you snapped, snatching up a piece of paper from beside him. “I don’t care if it’s helping Timmy Two-toes find his lost shoe. Don’t you get it? I’m fine with working with you on it. An attempt to be civil with you… Hopefully I won’t choke you *this* time.”

He accepted the case so fast that it was nary ten minutes until the client came ringing at the door. You barely had enough time to scrape an outfit together from the pieces you had, but when the boy came to sit down at the chair, you were at least presentable to the stern father that accompanied him.

“My mom died two years ago,” the boy articulated quite clearly. “But now I see her everywhere I go. She calls me by my name and sometimes she gives me nice things, but my dad doesn’t believe me. I tried telling him what she told me… She said that she wants me to come with her so we can play together.”

Sherlock looked like he wanted to pretend to be dead in order to avoid taking this case, but you were better at handling such affairs, and you went out to play a game with the boy as the father debriefed Sherlock about the mother.

“Gloria’s death was hard on Liam,” he’d confided. “He loved her very much. But he’s not exactly a boy of fantastic imagination or anything. Sensible even for his age. I don’t see where he’d get these ideas. He’s been going on about this for ages… Almost as long as Gloria’s been gone. But it always happens when he’s alone. I’ve never seen her speak to him myself.”

“You mentioned money over the phone,” Sherlock had replied. “What would that mean?”

Gloria had apparently left a lot of money behind in order for Liam to be financially taken care of, to be given to him when he came of age. Until then, Liam’s father held onto it.

“What could happen to him if he goes on like this? Where he keeps seeing my wife?” he’d asked, beginning to panic. “Would they take him away? They couldn’t do that, could they?”

By then you’d returned and stopped Sherlock from saying something insensitive. Assuring him that he had nothing to worry about, you explained that you just needed to grab your wallet, since Liam had passed a sweets store on the way over and was begging to get something.

“You don’t have to pay,” his father assured you. “I’ve got it covered.”

“Oh, it’s no problem,” you said, feigning insistence, “but let’s all go out. We can talk some more.”

“I’ll come with you,” Sherlock said, rising to take his coat. “We’ll only be gone a minute.”

“You’re not invited!” you cried, suddenly losing the essence of maturity that you’d had before.

“Can’t have Gloria’s ghost haunting Liam at every step, now, can we?” Sherlock held the door open for you and Liam excitedly bounded out, with you dragging your feet after him.

Liam was ahead of you with his father as you and Sherlock walked together. You were unable to find any sort of words to right the situation, so you did as you usually did and started off in the middle of a thought and just went for it.

“I know you must have had to,” you said, trying to keep your voice even. “You already told me that my life might be in danger, and all that. But you told me that you had people working for you, that even Molly and all those homeless people were useful to you.” Suddenly impassioned, you grabbed his sleeve and made him look at you. “Why couldn’t I have done anything for you, Sherlock? You *know* I would have. I would have done whatever you asked, if it meant that I could have helped you!”

Sherlock looked down at you helplessly. You could at least bumble through your emotions and string together some sentences to describe the, but he was not so blessed. There were so many minefields within this conversation that he was unsure how to dodge them all. But your gaze was so sad, so imploring, that he knew that saying nothing would be some sort of crime.

“It was wrong to deceive you, I don’t doubt that,” he told you, “but I’ve put your life in danger before. I’ll likely do it frequently in the future. But you *are* important to me. I never presumed that that was a lie, or some fabrication to keep you tame. I had many criminals to hunt down, more than you could count, and this was something that I had to do alone. Bear in mind that I had to lie to John, too, and you did say that he’s my soul mate…”

“I hate you saying that you have to be alone! You don’t have to be. You never have to be! I always let you know that you could count on me… You could trust Molly but you couldn’t trust me? Granted, she’s wonderful, but I could have done something for you…”

“You’re helping me now, for what it’s worth.”

“Oh, really? Doing what?”

He shrugged, at a loss for a reply. “I don’t know. Existing? Some people are so obnoxious when they do, but your existence is quite pleasant.”

You couldn’t bite back a smile, and you looked down at the ground. Only God knows what would happen if you ever dated a man who could properly tell you that he loved you. “Ah, Sherlock, I guess it’s just… I don’t know. When we were dating, I always had this certain sort of nightmare… That we were together, and then all of a sudden, you didn’t recognize me. Everybody did but you. You wouldn’t even look at me, and you wouldn’t talk to me when I said your name. And I thought, ‘Ah! He’s forgotten me?’ and then I’d realize that I still hadn’t caught up to you yet, that we couldn’t possibly be together, being so different at everything and me not being able to be with you because of it. And I don’t want that to happen… You always knew that. But if I feel that I can’t help you, what good am I? We’re supposed to be partners.”

He scowled down at you, unhappy. “Being partners does not mean getting stabbed at the same time. I’ve put you in danger often enough. It’s a wonder that you complain so much over me trying to protect you for once.”

“Wow! That’s true…”

Sherlock now refused to look at you. “I understand that forgiveness is tricky. Feel free to take as much time as you need. I wouldn’t want you to be engaged to me while loathing me. The last thing I need is resentment… I get that enough from anyone else.”

Liam was patiently waiting with his father at the crosswalk, and you both stood behind him. You were struck by the insane urge to hold Sherlock’s hand, but you weren’t sure if you were going to send mixed messages considering where your hands had been in the airport. You were staring at the light, waiting for it to change, when suddenly Liam cried out: “*Mom!*”

The cry was a shock to both you and Sherlock, which was probably why you both didn’t immediately react when the kid bolted out into traffic. And, you being quicker to react than Sherlock and not panicking like Liam’s father, you went out right after him.

Thankfully, the light had already been turning, and you didn’t see any immediate danger to Liam. No danger, except for the car that was still barreling through, trying to beat the red light.

You didn’t have enough breath in you to yell out. Instead, you used all the might you had to body slam Liam out of the way like a hockey player checking a rival into the boards, though Liam went a surprising distance, probably because his underdeveloped body was still light and delicate. You, on the other hand, were staring down a cab that only now realized that blowing through a red light wasn’t a great idea.

Sherlock watched you get hit by a cab on the first day of you being reunited with him. As you might say: *Double-wow!*

At first he thought that you were dead, but a quick jogging of his memory made him recall that you had jumped and turned so as to not roll under the car. No… You’d hit the windshield on purpose, rolling off with purpose, hitting the ground with purpose… He had seen that form before. Suddenly a flash of rage went through him. *Coveney taught you that!* That man was always trying to impress women by seeming dangerous… He’d had a lot of his friends drive cars at him so he could show how to angle oneself and jump and do all of that stuntman nonsense so as not to die. Fuck that man! But also, bless him!

Of course, you still hit the ground rather roughly, and he was at your side the moment you let out a loud, improper “*Fuck*!”

“Wow!” was what you said as you blearily looked up at him. “Almost a cliffhanger, that one was…”

“What are you blathering on about?” he snapped.

“I don’t know…” You tried to right yourself. “Where’s Liam?”

“Oh, he’s young. Children have ridiculously forgiving bodies, anyway…”

Still, he looked up to find out where the boy had gone. Liam was still sprawled out near the sidewalk, dazed but unhurt, staring slack-jawed at the crowd. *He’d called for his mother,* he knew. He barely had enough time to turn his head when Liam’s father came barreling across the walk, body-slamming a victim of his own, one that happened to look just like his dead wife.

“He’s got it taken care of,” Sherlock assured you.

“He didn’t pause to check on Liam?” you asked, incredulous. “Well, good for him. That makes our job easier, eh?”

“Are you hurt?” Sherlock asked, deciding to go to more important matters. “Did you break your wrist?”

“Oh, no… Coveney taught me how,” you said, much to his chagrin. “I should have warned you before I did it, yeah, but there wasn’t much time. I’ll be fine… Just a little banged up.”

For no reason, a soft mood settled over him, and for once, a case was not the most important thing to him. “Your flat isn’t far from here. I can take you over and get you settled in. Check you for any latent damage. There’s a hospital nearby, in case…”

“Stop, stop!” you cried, desperately trying to work your way to sitting up. “I’m fine. I really am, Sherlock, don’t worry about me. But when I’m being hit by a car, you know, it sort of sorts out your priorities. I should have told you that I love you, and that I do forgive you, and of *course* I still want to be engaged to you, for Christ’s sake. I wanted you to be alive for those years and I’m not going to change my answer now that you’re alive and your usual awful self…”

The crowds around the two of you first could not comprehend why you’d run out into traffic, nor why a man had tackled a strange woman to the ground, nor why the victim who had been hit by the car was suddenly being kissed in the middle of the road. London is a strange place, after all… Best not to question everything!

“Don’t think I’m still not totally irate, though,” you told him when he was still close by you, your weak fingers knotted in his hair. “I'm going to be giving you hell for months about this. There's absolutely no excuse for not telling me anything!”

“Yes, yes, I know…”

“And you could have told me before *Anderson*, at least!”

“He was eager to know how I survived…”

“You don’t think *I* am? It’s worse than Penelope and Odysseus over here. You’re going to be up all night, explaining things to me, but like them, we’ll wait until I’m done ravaging you…”

That was true, but until then, you had the case to close. Gloria’s ghost was no ghost (that much seemed obvious from the tackling), but rather, her estranged sister who merely bore a somewhat close resemblance. “Grief wreaks havoc on the memory,” Sherlock had told you, and it was easy for the young Liam to mistake the woman for being his mother. The sister in question had had a falling-out with Gloria years before she’d met her husband, which explained why he had no memory of any sisters. Her intentions were stupid to you, though. Kidnapping a nephew and trying to get his dead mother’s last gift to him as ransom money? Some people were too awful for you to deal with.

“Criminals are known for being despicable, but she didn’t quite think things through,” Sherlock told you. “For all we know, she’s just a sociopath.”

“Like we haven’t had enough of those,” you said, yawning.

“I hope you’re not tired already. It’s only six and you promised you’d ravage me, or something along those lines.”

“I did no such thing!” you squawked. “People are going to go on for ages, talking about how I forgave you too easily. You should be lucky you’re even feeling my bed sheets.”

You tried to hurry him up as you neared your flat, feeling fatigue sweep over you. After years of his absence and your restless grief, it was strange to have him beside you again. Every so often you felt the senseless urge to reach out and touch him to make sure that he really was there and you hadn’t imagined him, and you even paused fishing around for your key in order to kiss him repeatedly. But his presence also brought a strange sense of calm, and as you entered your flat, your sleepiness washed over you so hard that you thought you might fall asleep on the carpet.

He looked at you and gave you a genuine smile. “Not too tired for the ravaging?”

“Oh, no,” you said, though your tone was obviously drowsy. “We’re going to do it. Consummation and all of that. Definitely.”

“Mhm… Definitely.”

It’s a wonder how you managed to fumble out of your clothes and get onto your bed, seeing as how you could barely see straight. Airplane rides always wreaked havoc on your internal clock, regardless of the time zones you’d crossed, or lack thereof. You didn’t even bother musing about whether or not jet lag would have seriously affected you if you came from Sweden. All you knew was that you were tired, so *sleepy,* which was the exact opposite of what you wanted to feel now that you were reunited with your beloved detective.

“Don’t give me that look,” you said, sidling up to Sherlock’s side as he took off the last of his clothes. “We’re going to do it. Don’t think I’m lying.”

“I didn’t say you were,” he said, watching you with some amusement as you burrowed under the covers and shot him a drowsy glare.

“I’m just getting comfortable. We’re going to have sex, I *mean* it,” you said, unable to suppress another yawn. “So much sex…”

He wondered if he should seduce you to rouse you, but the proximity to your breast was making him drowsy and suddenly he felt just as fatigued as you were, perhaps not from an airplane ride, but from relief, from relaxation. His entire body felt at ease, a sensation he didn’t usually get unless he was already finished with a bout of sex, and slowly, slowly he eased himself down between the sheets with you.

“Tomorrow morning,” he decided for you, stretching out like a cat and settling his head against the pillows. “Or the middle of the night. I don’t care much. Just make sure I’m fully awake so that I can… appreciate the gravity of the situation…”

“Sounds like a plan,” you said, getting closer so that your whole body was pressed against his. “I don’t know what I should say in this situation. I need to say *something.* I think there’s something that they say at times like these.”

“’Good night?’” he guessed, closing his eyes and furrowing his brow as you wrapped yourself around him.

“No, they have something more specific, more poetic,” you said, your voice getting thick and soft as you drifted off into unconsciousness. “I don’t remember how it went. Something like… I don’t know. ‘*Welcome home. Welcome here*.’”

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## Chapter 50: Vedrai carino

**Author's Notes:** i updated the section for this story on the main page. .....i'll leave you to your deductions

i was actually surprised that the wedding fell on that date (since my birthday is so arbitrary) and of course there's historical connotations with that date. and like i said, it's also my birthday. *my birthday's in a week, ~happy birthday to me~*

i'm taking artistic liberties (no surprises here) and adding the janine subplot in early because i can and i will, since the actual wedding day makes sense if it's in august too, which is when lady smallwood visits sherlock and if you looked at muh page like i asked it would make sense why i'm squishing the events together--

---

You and Sherlock were occupied the next morning, and you decided to take the day off so that you could occupy him for the rest of it. By the following day, both you and your fiancé were properly sated (for the time being) and you could go about your lives with some degree of normalcy.

Admittedly, you didn't miss *some* things when Sherlock was gone. Not two weeks after his return to you, he'd sent you out to stalk some serial stabber without any kind of backup, simply because "it seemed more economical that way." You had to borrow Coveney's bicycle for it, which promptly got stolen when you had to give chase to the stabber through a crowded shop, and *you* had to pay for a new one. And then you came home after just barely managing to come out of it unharmed to find Sherlock inspecting a bunch of bones on your kitchen table.

"Please tell me those are animal bones," you sighed, finding a spot to put your purse.

"I can tell you that, but it may or may not be a lie."

"Ah, Sherlock! There's, what, eighty bones there?! How did you *get* them all?"

"With care, my darling girl." He groped around for a jawbone while inspecting what you presumed to be the matching skull. "I presume you were able to come out of the situation in one piece?"

"Just barely. I was worried for a minute there," you replied, yawning. "You're so awful. You could have at least been there to observe me angrily cycle through a group of schoolchildren."

"I was positive that you could do it without my coddling suffocation…"

"Well, it wasn't easy, and I wouldn't mind being coddled right about now…"

Sherlock heard the fatigue in your voice and invited you over without hesitation. You sat on his lap and tucked your hands into your own, watching him study the bones with delicate care. Anyone else in your position would have been labeled a nuisance or a distraction, but you were privileged and you could do as you liked, and he never complained or asked you to move. It was times like those that you could easily forgive him for making you go through those tribulations. Where would he be without you, anyway? He'd just make John do those errands for him, and you'd do them a hundred times for free so long as he let you get intimate with him afterwards.

"You know," you muttered into his ear during a pause, "I've been thinking."

"About what I'm doing with these bones? It might be complex for you, but it's fascinating. I'm–"

You laughed. "I'm thinking about *weddings*, Sherlock."

"What?" He froze abruptly, running through your possible motivations for bringing it up. "Yes, I'm equally irritated at the fact that the date needs to be continuously put off, but I assure you, once I find time away from cases, I'll…"

"Not *our* wedding… John and Mary's wedding." You pressed a cheek against his curls and sighed. There *was* a certain date on your mind, one that you were reminded of when you looked at the wedding invitations, but you decided that it wasn't the best time to bring it up. "Do you think I'll look nice in purple?"

"Lilac. And yes. Compliments your hair very nicely."

"A wonderful answer." You snuggled a little closer against him. "I just hope that it doesn't make my hips look too huge. And, hey–is it a guy thing that you don't talk very much about John's wedding?"

"Not a topic I find worthy of a lengthy discussion, so, 'no.'"

"Oh, it's all right if you're not jumpy-excited about it. Not that you're jumpy-excited about anything except a good serial murder, but still. He's your friend, and things might change, but he's not going to go back to being a stranger once he's got a ring on his finger."

"I never presumed that," he snapped, but then after a pause, he said, "*You* have married friends, don't you? Isn't it obnoxious to see them getting married off?"

"I might have thought that, oh, a while ago," you mused, furrowing your brow. "I was always sort of jealous. I had a hard time finding men that I wanted to marry. In this day and age you shouldn't just marry anyone. I was fanciful about it for a while, and then I was cynical, but now I'm content." You gave him the most serious look that you could muster. "It's not obnoxious because I have what I want. I'm happy to have a life with you, Sherlock. If it sounds sentimental, it's because it is, but it's true."

"Hmm…" He suddenly found a bone that was incredibly interesting. "Perhaps I could say… Something along the lines of *ditto.*"

"That's nicer than I expected! Hey, I hope the wedding goes well. The last one I went to, I broke my wrist just a *minute* before the whole thing, it felt like. So naturally I couldn't do anything fun…"

Due to your care, you didn't break any bones before John's wedding day. Nothing went wrong as you watched the ceremony and cast suspicious glances at Mary's maid of honor. But despite your best efforts to keep lucky for the rest of the night, you managed to get food poisoning before the reception even started, and you spent an inordinate amount of time getting intimate with a toilet in a variety of unsexy positions as everyone else spent their time canoodling (and playing murder mystery, as you'd find out later).

"What's going on?" you called out to Frances, who had come in to check on you.

"Nothing much," she said, and it sounded like she was barely suppressing a yawn. "Your fiancé gave a speech and it was actually quite nice. You'd think that the only thing that can come out of an arsehole is shit, but he did a good effort!"

"Oh, I'm not upset I missed it," you insisted, trying to stand, though abdominal pain doubled you over immediately. "I've probably heard it a million times by now. He's been trying so hard to think up a good one… He was even trying to orate in his sleep."

"Ah! I taped it for you, don't worry. You'll be proud. I guess you didn't miss anything else, except the two of them going off to solve a murder of some kind."

"*What*?!" You tried to jolt into a standing position, only for another cramp to cripple you, like somebody hitting you in the gut with a baseball bat. "No *fair*! I want to come along! Why does he send me off on bicycles to do kid's work, and I can't go after a *murderer*…?"

Luckily, one more encounter with the toilet left you feeling better than ever, and after gargling several times and eating a banquet's worth of breath mints, you felt good enough to depart before the dancing started–and you could stand missing sentimental, once-in-a-lifetime, heartwarming speeches, but it would take Satan himself to stand between you and down-and-dirty drunken dancing.

Frances twirled you around a couple of times to make sure that you looked presentable. Her tongue was peeking out a little between her teeth, which you knew by now to be a sign of her worrying, but when you asked her about it, she just shrugged.

"It's nothing to be all concerned over," she assured you. "It's just…"

"Wow! You could have just said *but*, which means *forget that first sentence*…"

"Today's a special day for you and Sherlock, isn't it? I remember when you first told me–"

You stopped her with a shake of your head. "I don't expect him to remember dates very well. Besides, this is John and Mary's day. If he's been exhausted over making sure everything goes well for them, I'm not going to expect him to remember this little thing."

She still seemed a little concerned, but you, finally not feeling sick, felt as though you were floating through the heavens. The wedding had put you into a romantic mood, and you hoped that you would be able to wriggle some sentimentality out of him, just in case he was feeling the same way… Ah, where was your beloved fiancé? You heard a violin being played somewhere, and, after a few moments, applause…

…and some time later, after Sherlock had left the wedding early, he stopped in his tracks to realize that he had left someone behind. It wasn't until you breathlessly cried out his name did he turn to see his fiancée bounding towards him, with you holding your shoes in your hand as you jogged up to meet him. And that very small, practically inconsequential detail–the sight of your heels bumping into your thighs as you ran–was bafflingly endearing to him for no reason at all, and he was overcome with such a feeling of guilt that his heart began to pound as you finally stopped in front of him.

"You could have waited for me!" you sighed, trying to catch your breath. "At least *tell* me when you're leaving."

"I didn't want to spoil your good time," he admitted. "I know how you feel about dancing."

"Yeah, I was just about to go with Coveney… He's a madman on the dance floor, a one-man party, and don't *look* at me like that. But I would rather dance with *you*. I'll give you credit… That attempt at selflessness was good. I give you a pass…" You brushed off the front of your dress. "I just needed to get my jacket and make a couple of good-byes. So how'd the murder business turn out?"

"It worked out. Tell me, darling; how would you have done it?"

"Done what?"

"Killed a man without being present at the scene of a murder."

"Oh! That's easy." You shrugged. "I see that sort of thing on the telly all the time. You just kill them before they know that it happened. Like when I was a kid; you know…" You narrowed your eyes, trying to deepen your voice. "***You are already dead***! Except, you know, you don't tell them that. Like a fatal blow you don't feel yet."

Sherlock stared at you for a long while before shaking his head and continuing on. "You know, you'd be a great help to me if you actually bothered to *say* something."

"You don't keep me apprised of *all* of your cases, you know." You clasped his hand merrily. "Besides, it's no fun if your wife's in your work all the time."

"Not if you like your wife."

You laughed. "Obviously you're not fooling Fran. She's convinced we're having some kind of secret row." You let your clasped hands swing between the two of you, as if you were schoolchild-lovers. "I could get used to these kinds of rows."

He stopped in his tracks, his expression one of revelation. "What'd you say?"

"Quite a bit."

"Did she think we were having a spat?" He whirled to face you. "To think Frances Harper could have given me an *idea*…"

You made a face. "After callously abandoning me at the wedding, the least you could do is tell me what you're thinking without making me guess."

"Listen," he said. "Listen. It's a good thing that we left separately, that we weren't together for most of the day. We need to break up."

“Ex*cuse* me?” The face you’d made a second before worsened. “This is… a turn of events.”

“Trust me on this–I’ll explain everything to you, I promise. For all intents and purposes, we’ll still be engaged. But this… We’ll need to be broken up. And I need to worm my way into the affections of Mary’s maid of honor.”

“*Janine*?”

“Yes, I’m fairly certain that was it. Her. I’ll need to form a relationship with her. Purely tactical, you understand, and… What?”

Even Sherlock Holmes couldn’t keep going when he saw the look on your face. You were desperately fighting to keep a straight face, to appear calm and perhaps even aloof, but the hurt tears were welling in your eyes and you couldn’t look him full in the face.

“So that’s how it’s going to end?” you said, your voice so low and quiet that you might have just taken his heart out and smashed it with your high heels.

“What? No, that’s not what I meant at all. It’s going to have to do with a *case*. I…”

“Don’t try to lie to me,” you snapped, like a slap to him. Your tears suddenly became those of rage, and you glared up at him, your jaw clenched. “I’ve seen how you looked at Janine. *Please* don’t think I’m stupid by insisting that this is about a case.”

The feeling of something being out of his control had never been a pleasant one, and though he had the urge to take you by your shoulders and shake you around until the truth fell upon you, he did his best to remain still. “I’m not lying to you. *Please*, this is important to something I’m working on. I’ll explain everything to you once I get the details worked out. And I’ll still see you as often as I can…”

“I always thought that we were engaged too long,” you sighed, defeated, crossing your arms. “That bland mood that they claim infects marriages–maybe that applied to us. But I always had the inkling that things would be different, after your ‘death.’ I just never thought you’d get bored of me.”

“I’m not– That’s not how it is!” Everything seemed to be going wrong, very wrong, and suddenly words, which he usually picked out so carefully, began to flow from him. “I promise you, I thought of you constantly while I was gone. Constantly. Some days, I couldn’t bear to take it. I *had* to see you, but my brother… He assured me that you were doing fine. But I knew just as much about you as you did about me during that time. I didn’t know if you’d found another lover, if you’d moved on, which you were well within your rights to. I didn’t… I don’t care if you hate me for asking this of you. But you *must* know that my feelings for you haven’t changed. I…”

It was silent for one, two, three, *four* harrowing heartbeats. Shame settled over him for confessing what he just did. It wasn’t like him–at worst, you might think him suspicious for making such a sentimental and soppy confession, no matter how true it was. You weren’t looking at him, and for a minute he panicked that you hadn’t been listening to what he’d said, and…

…and then your gaze slid over so that you were giving him a sideways look, and then a smile curled onto your mouth. The hurt and anger that had taken up residence on your visage mere moments earlier washed away immediately, and you laughed. *Laughed*!

“That went on longer than I thought it would!” you admitted. “You can usually tell when I lie. Ah! What a reaction!”

“You…!” He had been too loquacious before, and now he was speechless.

“Oh, yes! I’m not mad at all; I mean it!” You took his hand up again and squeezed it heartily. “I can tell you were in a serious mood about that case, and if this Janine-thing will help you out, by all means do it. Might be a bit tricky to convince people I’m over you when your cologne’s all over me while I’m at work, but I can manage. Maybe I’ll get some work done at home without your hand getting dangerously close to my arse all the time… Ah, what’s that look for?”

“That was badly done,” he burst, looking genuinely hurt. It was uncommon for him to act such a way around you, but you managed to be guilty for only a moment.

“It’s called *getting even*, Sherlock,” you said, gently prodding his chest. “Not a good thing to do in a marriage, but since we’re going to be broken up soon, I think it’s fine. I mean it. I suffered for a long time when you were gone, honey… It’s only fair that you get three minutes of your own pain.”

“…I wasn’t celebrating our time apart,” he told you grimly.

“Yes, yes, I understand… I won’t do something like that again. But you made a funny face; I think that was the first time I ever thought you were cute, Sherlock. We’re even… We should celebrate.” You two were momentarily bathed in shadow, and you pressed him against a wall with a smile. “Could I have a public kiss?”

“Ah… *fine*,” he said grudgingly. “You haven’t had your monthly one yet.”

With a little noise of celebration you pressed your lips to his. You held him close to you, and for a fraction of a second he held you closer to him, and after you broke apart you noticed he was staring.

“What?” you asked, your smile widening.

“For some idiot moment, I thought, *your eyes are glowing*… Clearly we’d benefit from a brief break. I appear to be turning into a cheap romance novel.”

“Ah, c’mon, then, you buffoon… We still have a while ago until we can break up properly without it looking so suspicious. And it definitely won’t be tonight. We have an anniversary to celebrate.”

Sherlock ran through his mental calendar and came up with nothing. “…We do?”

“See? I told her you wouldn’t remember…” You held up your left hand and gave your fingers a wiggle. “Does this ring any bells?”

All the blood seemed to drain from his body. “It can’t be… The 18th of May…?!”

“Yeah! You proposed to me, forever ago, today. You played me something from *Madame Butterfly* and it was a big, lovely affair. Didn’t expect you to remember, since it was forever ago… Still, I nearly had a heart attack when the Watsons announced the date.”

“Then we have some celebrating to do. Your place is closer.”

“Mmm, yes…”

After the both of you returned to your flat, you looked around for an old opera record and put it on. He was caught off-guard by a wicked smile as you approached him and put your hands on his chest.

“I did have to talk to Janine to see where you were,” you said slyly, adjusting his tie. “She told me something interesting.”

“Oh, God…”

“Why didn’t you tell me that you were into dancing? So many wasted opportunities!”

“It’s… It doesn’t *quite* fit with my appearances. I have quite a few reasons…”

“Ahh, don’t be like that. Whatever you do is what Sherlock Holmes does. Isn’t that right? That’s how it goes. Now, I haven’t told you everything about me, either.”

“No…?”

“I wasn’t sure if you could deduce it, since you can usually deduce the height of the heel I wore two days ago. But I took a lot of dance classes when I was at university. Head-over-heels for it. So I can’t embarrass you too bad. Here–just the two of us.”

The music was–nice. Very soft and slow… Relaxing, and the lights were dimmed down, and you both had a certain drowsiness about you. He had left the wedding with some foolhardy notion that he was alone, but you were there in front of him with that glow in your eyes again, and you had that familiarity about you, as though you’d be there forever and a day for him. Constancy had always been a good virtue, with you…

“Like this. Here, put your hand on my waist there…”

“Hmm…”

“And like *this*. …See…?”

“Mmm, yes…”

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# Chapter 51: Riedo!... perché?

**Author's Notes:** in which "separated again? this is some BULL SHIT"

to make up for rea-tan being sad and lonely... next chapter... mary

I also might add an additional chapter onto this so 1) it's 55 instead of 54, which isn't round enough and 2) I'm not cramming everything into the last chapter. But the last arc is split into two chapters so hopefully those will come one after the other sooner than this [gestures wildly at myself]

---

The sight of a window opening in your apartment from the outside would usually be a cause for you to pull out your sidearm and start firing at will, but today, it’s a good thing. You know who’s going to slip in through the crack and push open your curtain; when you heard him call out your name softly, fearing the flat empty, you know that the affair is about to start.

“Hello,” you greeted with a smile, padding over to him and wrapping your arms around his neck. Ordinarily he’d probably find such a gesture saccharine, but you were more than happy to be playing this game. “Find your way in all right?”

“Be glad your fire escape doesn’t point to anything but a brick wall,” he grumbled with some contempt, brushing himself off. “Otherwise everyone will see...”

“…see the great Sherlock Holmes, seeing another woman, yet slipping into the flat of his ex?” You waggled your brows.

“I’m sure you don’t need another scandal surrounding you…”

“Oh, that reporter thing? That was *ages* ago! This is a different sort of animal… The art of an affair.” As if to prove it to him, you went up on tip-toe to kiss him. “How’s Janine?”
By the looks of it, Janine was the last thing he wanted to discuss when you were pressed against him with your mouth mere inches from his own. “It’s going slower than I hoped. Irritates me a bit that I have to start from square one, so to speak. I’m already at an advanced stage with you.”

“You make it sound like a disease,” you teased, giving him another kiss before slowly moving backwards towards the bedroom. You were so dizzy with delight of finally seeing him that you could hardly stand it; the thought of him being affectionate and intimate with another woman, even with an ulterior motive, would have bothered you any time but now. “Do go on.”

“I’m sure she’s noticed that I’ve been unavailable every night at Baker Street, but I’m not interested in dealing with those sorts of emotions.” He diverted your path slightly so you wouldn’t run into a wall.

“You’re a handsome gentleman; I’m sure she’s asked you for something by now. Did my advice work?”

Knowing that Adam Coveney lusted after women who were unavailable, you had suggested that your lover drop agonizingly unsubtle hints to him about a threesome. It had been a joke, or maybe half of a joke, as Sherlock would never go for such advice in a million years.

“I would never request such a ridiculously idiotic plot,” Sherlock snapped, which meant that he had, just to fend off Janine’s advances and buy more time. Coveney had jumped at the idea, and when the three of them were in the bedroom together, Sherlock realized that there was absolutely nothing for him to do.

“In my experience–”

“What–”

“From what I see in films, a threesome is only really two people,” you said, even though you had zero expertise in the subject. “But anyway, it’s just a twosome right now, so can we–?”

Sherlock had successfully guided you to the bedroom and you stood at the foot of the bed. The affair could proceed; you did your best to tear his clothes off of him (“Not the shirt, someone will notice…” “True, true, all right, ah…”) and get him into your bed once more. In that room there were no cases or worries or cares, just you and Sherlock, you clambering on top to ride the fuck out of him as he jerked and groaned and clutched at you desperately. He needed more of you than you could possibly give in this brief period where you could only get so very little of him, not enough, it was never *enough*, yet even though he struggled to keep himself going he could only last so long before he came inside of you.

After a great deal of stroking and pleading and kissing he was hard again before too long; you were so desperate that you were like an animal the second time, vicious and pushy, demanding more than either of you could give. In the morning he’d have to be gone, maybe even in the middle of the night, and once more you’d have to be deprived of him. The second time you lost yourselves together, whining and crying, your moans so loud and obscene that it would have made a porn star blush, and it took you a long time to come back down. When you slid off of him, spent, your heart beating like a madman’s, you felt so melancholy that you knew it must have only been ten minutes at the least; yet when you turned to look at your window, you saw that the sun was setting and it had been nearly a half hour.

“I guess we’re not suffering too badly from our breakup,” you joked, your chest rising and falling rapidly as you wheezed and struggled to catch your breath. “I think, in my opinion, our illicit affair has made the sex that much better… You agree?”

“Hmm,” was his assent as he struggled to get his mental faculties back to their usual polished state. He had told you once that his climax usually came with a revelation about a case, but his most recent case had to be complicated, since the most recent bout of sex made him simply dizzy.

You sighed, a melancholy feeling settling over you as you wriggled over to press yourself against his side. You felt too hot to hold him just then, but you needed the contact that you’d been missing ever since he had pretended to break up with you.

You weren’t even sure that anyone at the office bought it. They probably just assumed that Sherlock was doing them all a favor by not showing up so often and that your ring simply didn’t fit anymore. A couple of your girl friends even had the gall to laugh when you did your best to tearfully confess that you and Sherlock weren’t together anymore.

“I know that it’s bad for you if it’s not convincing that we’re separated,” you mused, frowning, “but I think it’s good for us, generally. Isn’t it?”

“You mean I constantly have a ridiculously sentimental, sappy look on my face? *Generally?*”

“Well… You’re not wrong.” You shot him a conspiratorial smile. “At least I have someone to hold, when you’re gone.”

He would have shot up in bed, had you not exhausted the inexhaustible Sherlock Holmes. “You *what*?”

“Certainly you remember Sherotter… Well, I had to hide him away in the cupboard so that our affair would be completely secret. But he’s hiding there behind the lamp, and I have half a mind to kick you out and bring him here, since he’s a great deal cuddlier than you in the bedroom.”

That got him indignant, which in turn made him aggressively competitive, which was exactly what you wanted him to be. More like *needed* him to be: his time was split between cases and Janine, which meant little was left over for you. Though you enjoyed the initial independence of lounging around the flat all day on the weekends and getting work done and relaxing for a whole day without Sherlock texting you with a request for you to participate in an experiment of his, you found yourself sad and bored as time went on.

“This must be why people get married,” you told your cat with pure melancholy in your tone as you listlessly pushed a pillow around the floor with your feet. “How can it be worse than when he was supposed to be dead? Ridiculous…”

John called you up frequently, concerned that you were depressed over your separation from your fiancé. He was perceptive, Mary even more so, so you made sure to wait until a sad documentary was on before calling him up to blubber some tears before hanging up and turning to something more entertaining.

Still, your crying whines weren’t entirely made up. How much longer would this case with Janine have to be? You hadn’t broken up with him until some time after the wedding, but it was September now and you had seen him only a few times in a month. That meant you were almost locked out of the loop when it came to his status. He had urged you to stop texting him for fear that Janine was the type to go through text messages, and you had unhappily acquiesced, thinking that you’d still have some channel of communication left. You didn’t.

You woke up in a haze one morning on a day off, feeling as though you were forgetting something. Your phone was off so you didn’t notice the messages from John telling you that your fiancé had been dabbling in drugs for one reason or another, which would have stirred you into action, so instead you wandered around your flat as if in a dream. What was it? What was amiss? It was as if someone had dragged your furniture just a bit to the left and you kept bumping into everything without realizing it. What was it? What was different?

You raised your left hand to get a stray hair from your shoulder and found yourself staring at the naked space on your ring finger. For a few seconds you forgot what you were supposed to be looking at, your mind reeling, before it struck you: *My engagement ring.* You had taken it off weeks ago to go along with the story and hadn’t put it back on for fear of someone noticing, your brief sentimentality ruining Sherlock’s plans, but since you’d be in the privacy of your flat all day you didn’t see anything wrong with putting it on just because.

Immediately you tried to turn in the direction of your ring, only to find that your body wasn’t stopped, idly spinning in a circle. Panic made your heart drop to your stomach: where did you put it? You couldn’t remember anymore! You’d hid it in a safe place, somewhere ridiculous so that you’d be *sure* that you remembered it, yet you were drawing a blank on that secret hiding place. Where was it, where was it? Sherlock would deduce it in minutes, yet you were left groping at your drawers and cabinets, sliding them open in a hurry to find such a precious item. *He spent so much money on it.* You had asked after how expensive it was and nearly fainted at the answer. *Where did it go?*

With a cry you threw open the doors to your clothes cupboard, where you put your jackets, and found your two stuffed animals staring forlornly at you. The dusty scent brought up a rush of memory in you: laughing and snuggling away your ring box nearby, knowing that it’d be secretive since the weather had been too warm for your winter jackets. You picked up the hedgehog–precious, tiny Johnhog–and rustled around under the jumper you’d knitted for him to find the small bundle of your ring box.

“Jesus,” you sighed, collapsing onto the floor with relief as you held it in your shaking hands. “That was too much.” What a ridiculous change! At the start you’d been so happy to have time to yourself, and then– Collapsing over finding a temporarily lost item! Absolutely ridiculous! Sherlock would be standing over your crumpled form, laughing, making a snide remark about your emotions. *You were hung up on the ceiling by a meat hook and make jokes about it, and look at you!* That made you laugh until you wheeze as you slipped your ring onto your finger.

That was it! You just had to see him. Even if it was just seeing him from across the street… You just *wanted* to. You were well within your rights, as a fiancée. He wouldn’t be the only one allowed to call the shots! No way! You would have to shout him down to the ground about banning you from texting him! The smartest man you knew, unable to get a second phone for a would-be mistress!

Dressing yourself properly, you walked down to 221B, not bothering to call ahead to see where he was. You didn’t believe that Sherlock would be caught in an embrace with Janine, even with her impressive figure, but you were out of sorts and felt entitled to look at him from a long way away.

It seemed as though he was expecting a visitor. As you were plodding down the street you found yourself staring at a man exiting the flat, escorted by a bunch of intimidating-looking men. Accustomed to intimidating people, you weren’t frightened, though you found yourself staring at who was ostensibly their employer.

Immediately you identified him as a Swede. How could you not? You visited Sweden often, and you spoke Swedish. Even just his mutterings to his guards gave his heritage away. That made you curious; a Swede in London was a sight on its own, but a Swede coming out of Sherlock’s flat? Had he told you anything about the case, you would have connected the dots immediately, but since you knew nothing, you were left staring and pondering.

You couldn’t simply stride up to him and cry *Hej!*, especially with bodyguards around him, so you brushed off the front of your skirt and leaned against a lamppost, trying to remain casual in case he knew who you were.

Of course, as soon as he looked at you–glanced at you, more like–he identified you immediately. It would be impossible for a man of Charles Augustus Magnussen’s caliber to not know who Sherlock Holmes’s apparently beloved fiancée was. You thought that he was just looking you over, not realizing that you were in his database. You were easy to remember: in a sea of “normal,” your porn preferences ranged from “somewhat” to “very” kinky. It didn’t take much connecting to know that there were only so many reasons why someone who supposedly separated from Sherlock was standing outside of his flat, and as a result, he gave you an unsettling smile before he got into the car.

You could only stare stupidly as he was driven off, brief recognition flickering in your mind. Where had you seen him from? He looked familiar, but your mind wasn’t in the mood for who’s who and you proceeded to go to the doorstep of 221B. Before you had time to raise a fist to knock, however, the door flew open to reveal your fiancé and his old flatmate.

Sherlock was in such an excited hurry that he nearly bowled you over, and stopped himself only just before slamming into you. He recognized you even out of the corner of his eyes–he might have recognized you blindfolded, of course–and you stopped him right in his tracks.

“What is it?” said an unamused John Watson, who was stuck behind him in the doorway. “Anything wrong?”

“I…” It hadn’t even been that long since you’d seen him last, compared to those years, and yet you were at a loss for words. “I, ah…”

“What…” Oh, you’d think that you’d been apart from him for months on end, with the way he stared at you, dumbfounded! You were both geniuses in your individual respects, and yet… Complete babies! “What are you doing here?”

“What’s who doing here?” John demanded, out of the loop.

“I *had* to see you,” you burst, pushing him halfheartedly, wanting any kind of contact with him. “I’ll admit, it was incredible to not have to deal with your bullshit all day, but I don’t want to be apart from you *all* the time.”

(“Oh, for Christ’s sake,” John spat, recognizing your voice, “I’m not in the middle of a moment, am I?”)

“I’ll see you later tonight,” Sherlock promised, taking you by the shoulders and shaking you gently. “Just hold out until then. A breakthrough’s happening right now. I just need to get to the jeweler’s.”

That bemused you. “What?” You shook your head, remembering the strange incident that happened just minutes ago. “Sherlock, who was that Swede at your place?”

It was his turn to be shocked into speechlessness. Magnusson was a magnate, sure, but there were plenty of women who had no idea who he was. You had evidently forgotten him, yet you’d picked up that he was Swedish on sight! He would think you incredible, but of course that was a soppy thought and he’d have to decline for fear of inflating your ego.

“I need you to forget you ever saw him,” he told you, then, to get your mind off the subject as quickly as possible, “You don’t happen to have your engagement ring, don’t you?”

That made your eyes brighten. “Why, yes, actually! Funny story… Just earlier–”

“Great, I need to borrow it. Just for tonight; you’ll have it back soon. I just need to use it for something.”

“This next sentence won’t end well, will it?”

“I just need to propose quickly.” And then, impossibly: “I bought it. Doesn’t that entitle me to take it back and use it at my leisure?”

(“Jesus Christ,” John breathed.)

Your eyes narrowed to the point where you were staring at him through slits. “I should put this fucking ring on just to slap you so that it’ll hurt worse. Go find your own engagement ring, you twat!”

“I see your point.” Still excited, he took your dangerous fingers and pressed a swift kiss to them, as if to apologize, though he never did anything of the sort. “I’m meeting John at 7. I should be ready to see you only a few hours later.”

“Hopefully you get hit by a car first or something. Maybe the potential brain damage will have a positive effect on your shitty personality,” you pouted, still offended, though you could only be so offended after your time with him. “Well! Hurry up then! I’ll be waiting for you.”

John looked at you with the utmost confusion as Sherlock bounded away (evidently, to find a ring for some ridiculous purpose). “*What* just happened?”

“Oh, John! It’s a long story, but not a complicated one.” Figuring that he’d have work to do, too, you turned on your heel and started back to your own flat. “I’ll see you when you both are finished with… *whatever* it is, all right?”

“All right,” he assented, knowing that sometimes it was better to just give up.

You went back to your flat with a lighter heart. Sure, you still had no idea what was going on, and it pissed you off that he had intended to propose to someone else with your ring, but… In those few seconds, you were reminded about how much it was a pain in the ass for you to deal with those ridiculous cases of his, and sometimes it really was better to take a bath. Once you were back with him, it’d be nonstop killer-chasing and fingerprint-snuffing, after all.

You turned on the television for some sound in the room and left. Had you stayed for a little while longer, you would have heard the news blather on about something or the other against Charles Augustus Magnusson, and you would have had a heart attack. But that was for later; for the moment you were in the tub, letting the hot water cover you as you settled down with a sigh. Sometimes Sherlock Holmes was the world’s biggest twat, but even those minutes when you’d gotten to see him had made you happy. For a second you felt bad that you’d suggested that he’d be better off if harm came to him, but decided that you had nothing to feel sorry for, considering the time he’d put *you* in hospital during a fantastical event involving smoke inhalation in Glasgow.

Of course, fate can be cruel, and life usually listens to our most shameful, private requests; the next time you’d see Sherlock, he’d be in a hospital bed.

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# Chapter 52: Ecco un artista!

**Author's Notes:** *wow* what was i doing writing something this long

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You waited for Sherlock’s call at nine, but it never came. At first it didn’t worry you; it wasn’t anything you didn’t expect. His work wasn’t exactly anything that followed a schedule. Still, he had promised you a few hours, and when your phone was silent at eleven o’clock you began to worry.

“He could have at least told me what he was doing,” you complained to your cat, who didn’t seem to care one way or the other. “Then I could be the judge of whether or not he’s actually in danger…”

You called him a couple of times, but he didn’t pick up; neither did John, who, unbeknownst to you, had his hands full with a dying best friend. You closed your eyes, frustrated. How many more times were you going to be out of the loop like this? You were supposed to be his partner, and though you knew you weren’t going to take John’s place, you still expected at least some sort of lowdown.

It had been a long day, and you lay upon the sofa, trying to get yourself to just relax a bit. Getting worked up over nothing wouldn’t solve anything, right? It wouldn’t hurt anybody by closing your eyes for five minutes. Except you were drowsier than you thought you were, and you kept your eyes closed for longer and longer each time until you were dozing off in the darkness of your flat.

You dreamt three times of waking up to a phone message, so by the time your ringtone actually woke you up, you weren’t quite sure where reality was. The clock in the distance seemed a blur, so you grabbed blindly for your phone and lifted it to your ear.

“Hullo?” was the most you could manage, your voice deep and rough from sleep.

For a moment you forgot who was trying to call you. When you remembered, you expected Sherlock’s deep baritone mocking you for needing rest when he could work so long without needing so much as a power nap, but instead it was John calling you, and it sounded as though his nerves were frayed beyond repair. “Where are you?”

For a moment, with all the lights off, you couldn’t remember. “’m at home. What is it?”

“You sitting down?”

You frowned, pushing yourself up off the sofa cushions. Usually it took you a while to get yourself properly oriented after a nap, but the anxiety and strain in John’s voice was like a wake-up slap.

“Lying down, actually,” you replied, tense. “What is it?”

“Listen,” he said, “Listen– I don’t want you to worry…”

“Wow; oddly enough, that’s making me worry…”

“It’s a bit hard to explain…”

*Anything involving Sherlock is*, you knew. Once more you remembered that you’d been expecting a call from Sherlock, not him, and you had the unpleasant sensation of emptiness, as if in your two-person conversation you were aware of a glaring absence. “So what happened?”

“I…” He stopped, sighed, started again. “Sherlock’s been shot.”

The pause after these words was short as he realized how tactless the phrasing was, and though he was trying to assure you that Sherlock had been saved and was all right now, you were deaf to the words. The room seemed to close up in your confusion, claustrophobic as you were swallowed up in immediate panic. You sprang off of the sofa and began to pace erratically just to blow off steam, to get yourself moving in just some way. How could it happen? Sherlock had seemed so sure, so confident about his case. Arrogant as he often was, he cared about himself too much to let himself fall into danger like that without preparation… Well, most of the time. You had been shot before, at least technically, but it wasn’t anything you couldn’t just shrug off. And that had just been you, too stubborn to care about your injuries! Sherlock was the one who went without eating and sleeping because he just forgot! Just what happened to your fiancé that put him in hospital?!

John told you where the hospital was, giving up with trying to pacify you, and you threw some proper clothes on and took off. You had left your watch back at your flat and weren’t sure what time it was, but the sky was beginning to brighten and color itself. You hoped to Christ it was a sign of some sort. *Reading too far into natural phenomena, biased only towards the ‘signs’ that confirm what you want to see.* Ah, even half-dead he could bother you…

It was lucky that you were a fiancée of one of the hospital patients, or else you would have been an embarrassment. You burst through the doors confused, making unreasonable demands, and generally tiring out the nurses who had to deal with such a spectacle on a daily basis. He had seemed leagues away from you as you’d ran to the hospital, as if he existed on another planet, yet somehow the close distance you were to him now was worse. And to be told that you couldn’t yet see him was almost a death sentence, even as you were being reassured that you’d be told when he was fit enough to receive company.

As your brief fit of despair was fading you heard doctors talking about another patient somewhere behind you, and the clinical smell and feel of the hospital suddenly became apparent to you. It was too easy to get caught up in the films where a loved one came spitting and spinning and demanding for results, but in real life you had to remember that sometimes it was best to be an adult and just sit down, no matter how upset you were.

And you *were* upset. To be so close and yet so *far* was like torture. It would have been better if John had never told you the extent of Sherlock’s injuries. You were no Florence Nightingale aside from that time you’d had to shove pills down his throat, but you wished you could do *something*, your lack of medical training notwithstanding.

Thoroughly disgruntled, you found a place to sit and waited. In the intense light of the hospital, you could see yourself clearly, and only then did you notice your haphazard outfit. You had dressed yourself in the dark in a panic, so it wasn’t as though you were critical of yourself, but you couldn’t help but notice how many shades lighter your jacket was from your skirt. They were supposed to match–at least, they’d matched in the dark–but you couldn’t help but remember some vague earlier conversation you’d had with your fiancé, many years ago. *…this is backed up by your hastily thrown-on jacket that is meant to match your skirt but is consistently one to two shades lighter.* God, what an insufferable prick! You almost laughed, but it didn’t seem the right environment for it.

Your earlier exhaustion hadn’t yet worn off despite your panic–exhaustion waits for no man, after all–and you faded in and out of consciousness for a little while. You were only roused by John shaking your shoulder, telling you that Sherlock was conscious and you could go in to see him.

Your body went into high alert and you jumped up in a panic, flying down the hallway to where Sherlock’s room was. John Watson may have been your fiancé’s soul mate, but you were his bed mate, and damn it if that didn’t give you a slight edge. Yes! You’d be the first one in to see him! Then you can gloat over him and tell him that yours was the first face that he saw, coming back from the edge of death…

There were proper procedures for handling someone in Sherlock’s condition, and you ignored all of them, shaking him brusquely as if he owed you money and that was the first thing on your mind. (He actually did owe you quite a sum of money, but that wasn’t the point) Unfortunately, you hadn’t realized that “conscious” didn’t mean “alert” and Sherlock was little more than a limp slug in your arms, battered as you demanded some sort of statement from him to make sure that he was all right.

Within five minutes you were bored and left, going up to meet John and Mary, who gave you expectant looks. You shook your head, and, realizing that that sort of gesture was a bit ominous in a hospital, you shrugged.

“He’s being boring right now,” you told them, insensitive. “But you might want to go in to see him, anyway. It might be the first time you’ll see him completely silent and non-assholish.”

Relieved, John swatted you on the back. “I wouldn’t get too comfortable. I was just telling Mrs. Watson here– You know what Sherlock’s first word was, coming out of it? *Mary.* Just for a moment I thought he’d be in trouble again, this time by me…”

“Marry?” you repeated, mistaken. Obviously it’d have to be something else; even a near-death experience wasn’t enough to remind Sherlock of your forever-pending marriage to him (unless, naturally, it was convenient to him!). And then, realizing: “Oh! Wow! Damn, I’m slow today.”

“Hope you don’t mind or anything,” she joked, though there was something strange behind it. Sherlock’s recovery meant a time for relief, and both you and John were almost slap-happy in your glee. If anything, your fiancé’s improving health was a cause for concern for her, but before you could pursue such thoughts further your phone began to go off.

“Holy Christ,” you cursed, squinting to read the text. “Okay… Yes, it’s from work. Maybe it’s not the most practical thing to skip out on work whenever something dramatic happens. Because in Sherlock’s case, that’s every other week…”

So you had to return to work for a couple of days, dutifully spending as much time with Sherlock as you could. (Oh, he’d mock you once he found out you sat by his side while he was little more than slurring mess! *I know you don’t have too many hobbies, but couldn’t you spend your time being somewhat more productive than lurking around?*) To see him recovering was a celebration for you. You held your rabbit in your hands, the one he’d gifted you long ago as recompense for murdering another pet, and spun her around as voices from *Le nozze di Figaro* serenaded you.

Those voices were still in your head, buoying you around as you visited Sherlock the next day, dressed admirably with the anticipation that he’d be awake enough to pay attention to you for at least a few more minutes than normal. What would he say to you? Probably something rude, no doubt, but even in his rudeness to you there was always some affection to it.

Distracted by these somewhat sentimental thoughts, you had looked down to check your watch when someone speedily rounded the corner and crashed into you. You were prepared to mumble an apology when you straightened and saw exactly who you’d crashed into: someone familiar, someone with an immaculate form and whose nonexistent sexploits with your husband-to-be were all over the trash rags.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, apparently vaguely recognizing you as a taut smile pulled at her lips. “We’ve met before, right? At the wedding!”

An absurd ounce of jealousy surged through you at the sight of her, and you did your best to smile as you nodded at her. The only real competition you’d ever had was a manipulative dominatrix genius; you refused to be moved even an inch by this Janine! “You went in to see Sherlock?”

“Just had to gloat a bit,” she admitted. By all accounts she had a right to keep that smug look on her face, but it didn’t make you any happier. She looked at you for a moment more before her eyes widened in surprised recognition. “Oh, that’s right! You were the old fiancée, right?”

“Yeah, deffo.” Would it be a good idea to make up some excuse to wave your left hand in front of your face? You decided against it.

Janine gave you an almost pitying look, perhaps overestimating how similar your experiences had been. “You should have done your own exposé… You could have made *loads*. That is, if you don’t mind me asking– Was it just a lot of boring nights between you two, or is celibacy a new thing for him and his girlfriends?”

It was impossible to resist. And really, where would you get a chance like this again? Raising your brow, you pulled aside the collar of your blouse to reveal the shadows of love bites that ran up and down your shoulder. They were remnants of a tryst in a janitor’s closet of Scotland Yard, when five minutes was all you had.

“I guess it must be a new thing,” you decided.

You weren’t even certain what her reaction to that would be, and to her credit she laughed, impressed by the revelation. “Well, I guess that’s *one* explanation, eh…?”

…and from inside his room Sherlock could hear voices in the distance as he faded in and out, his mind betraying him as his brain demanded healthy sleep. He could pick out Janine’s simply due to the short time it had been since he’d seen her, and… And when he opened his eyes and saw that a woman had taken a seat across from him, he was almost scared to death that his fake fiancée was back to torment him. But he caught a few notes of what she was humming–*Questa sera spirerà… Questa sera spirerà…*–and you became clearer to him, your soft and warm and beloved figure, so familiar that it seemed like the sight of land after a month at sea. And–

“You’re giving me a soppy look now,” you told him with a laugh, but your voice was all warm as you leaned forward to give his hand a squeeze. “It’s good to see you awake, honey.”

“Hmm.” He gave you a bleary look. “I see your worry over me hasn’t made you lose a single pound, but you’ve let your hair go all limp… And, really? You’ve even brought your least expensive scarf to come and see me…”

“I hope you didn’t bully Janine when she was in here. You two are more alike than I give you credit for…”

Sherlock closed his eyes, leaning back. “*Sull'aria* is a preferable alternative. Are you in a romantic mood?”

“There’s nothing romantic about that song,” you pointed out, though you did remember when he’d first heard it with you– When you were watching that prison movie together and it came on, and you must have bruised his arm smacking it while saying *that’s Mozart! I have this whole vinyl!* “I would ask you how you’re feeling, but obviously you’re yourself, if you’re like this.”

“What’s *like this*?” he asked, or began to ask, since you leaned forward to kiss him and just the thought of the pressure of your mouth on his was much better than anything he could have said to fill the pause.

It was a soft kiss, since you didn't want to disturb his healing by getting too demanding, but it was a relief to him all the same. It felt like decades since he kissed you last, and it relaxed him to know that he was free to resume it whenever he felt like it. And so when you pulled away, he was already anticipating the next one with such furor that he looked at you expectantly and said, "Is that all? Surely you can do better than that…"

You scoffed. "Don't get so greedy. I can't wear you out."

He pondered this. "Did you try to do that ridiculous thing that they do in films? Kiss me when I was unconscious?"

"There was nothing romantic about sitting here while you were out, believe *me*. Especially when you would just stare into space and not say anything…"

"Just *once* more?"

It was so unusual to hear him request it that you had to oblige, leaning forward to press your lips against his once more. The second time felt like a cleansing, like every ounce of irritation you'd had due to his brief separation from you was being washed right out of both of you. When you leaned back your heart was beating a bit faster and you felt warm and content…

Well, warm and content until you remembered that your husband-to-be was lying in a hospital bed instead of his own, and you knew that someone had put him there in the first place. He'd been shot; he'd died on the table, albeit briefly. And he wasn't saying who had killed him.

But who could have done it? If he wasn't half as careful as he was, he would have only lasted a few years in the field. No one had been able to kill him except for himself. Even with a gun pointed at him, he would never be stupid enough to let himself get shot. So what on Earth would make him stand there stupidly and watch himself take a bullet?

*It would have to be in a situation where he thought he'd win,* you knew, though that didn't help matters; he always thought he had the upper hand. Your mind was going, racing, desperate to connect a few dots. *He wouldn't pull that with a stranger. He's faster than most strangers. It'd have to be someone smart. Someone smart who he wasn't able to control, but someone he thought he could talk to…*

Where had they gone that night? John had only given you sparse details. Whatever it was, he'd needed to know Janine for it, right? Or else he wouldn't have had to get close to her. And he was done with needing her, obviously… So was Janine connected to the person who shot him, or was it simply coincidence? Did you and Janine even have any mutual friends?

*…Just for a moment I thought he'd be in trouble again…* Mary; his first word was Mary, despite having no reason to be thinking about her at all as he roused himself into the world of the living. *Mary was concerned when he woke up.* John hadn't seen it, but then again, John wasn't the psychologist who'd been paid to make sense of those little, subtle expressions.

But that would be ridiculous… No, it wouldn't even make sense! What would be the odds? Mary was just one of millions in England. She had no reason to shoot Sherlock, no reason to be wherever he'd been at the same place and time. She was your bosom buddy… You'd hit it off the moment you met her. She was warm, bright, funny, lively. Even Sherlock liked her when he first met her. You'd told her so much about yourself; you'd been overjoyed to have a good woman friend to meet outside of work! And you didn't know her as anyone else but Mary, Mary Morstan, Mary with the good anecdotes and the reassuring smile and the little funny jabs… How would you know her any differently? It's not like you'd ever handed her your gun, observing her to see how expertly she held it.

It was such a stupid thought–Mary shooting Sherlock–that you wanted it erased from your mind entirely. Sherlock laughing at you was a quick and easy way for you to forget you'd ever said anything. It was its own reassurance. So that's why you'd said, only partly casually, "Sherlock, did Mary shoot you?"

Silence, complete silence. For a long time all you could hear was the whirring of some distant machinery. You were waiting for him to scoff, to give you a withering look of derision, but there was nothing. For a minute you weren't even looking at him, and when you finally held your breath and shot him a look you found him staring into space.

"Incredible," he mused. "Over eight million people in London and you pick the right one out of a hat."

You wanted to spit back at him that *it wasn't a hat!* but you were caught off-guard by the casual confession, as if you'd correctly guessed something much less important than the woman who'd put a bullet in him.

"So it's true?" You didn't feel as though the wind was knocked out of you; you felt as though all the oxygen in your body had simply slipped out and disappeared. "Sherlock, how? *Why?*"

"It's a long story," he said, wincing from pain as he struggled to move up. With an authoritative arm you pushed him back to a more comfortable position. "And one I'm not yet fully knowledgeable on. It's nothing for you to worry over."

"*Nothing?* She *killed* you!"

"She merely wounded me…"

"No, she killed you… I was there when you *died* on the operating table!"

"Yes, I guess that did happen…" Despite your shock and horror you were still somewhat impressed that you had figured out the gunwoman all by yourself, and yet Sherlock seemed already miles and miles ahead of you in terms of plotting. "Are you keeping an eye on John for me?"

"I am *now.*"

"Fantastic. If you've caught on, it'll mean that he's not too far behind."

You folded your arms. "Because we both move at a snail's pace, or because we're both so brilliant?" Well, that wasn't entirely fair… He had called you brilliant once, though maybe not verbally. "What do you want me to do?"

"You'll have to help me arrange something… I'm not quite mobile at the moment."

"Oh…?"

Of course you'd do anything for your injured fiancé, even if it meant having to get together a projection system that would broadcast Mary's face on the side of a building. ("Sherlock, you're a lot more dramatic than you give yourself credit for…") You understood Sherlock's plan to be something that included John, which meant you wanted nothing to do with it. It went beyond you having the knee-jerk urge to shoot Mary in retaliation; this was a new level of domestic spat between the Watsons and you weren't exactly trained in marriage counseling. Besides, Sherlock's viewpoint didn't exactly match up with yours.

"It was meant to happen," he'd told you. "Whether or not he wants to believe it, John is drawn to that sort of person."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean? Are you blaming *him*?"

"He *did* choose her."

"Yes… There was no other reason he'd want to marry her, besides from the slight subconscious inclination that she might have been a cold-blooded killer at some point in her life."

He'd furrowed his brow. "It might not have hurt…"

"What does that say about *me*, huh? Am I your gooey, soft, sweater-wearing foil to your sheer, sleek badassery?"

But then he'd pointed out that you were practically his bodyguard and were the first to pull out your weapon in a dangerous situation. Well! He wasn't wrong! Bringing you along for a case meant that someone would have a bullet hole at the end of the night… Oh, but that had to be different! He just needed someone watching his back all the time…!

So John and Mary's relationship began to disintegrate as yours and Sherlock's improved once more. This time, when you told your friends that you were engaged to the detective once more, they were baffled; when did the two of you break off? They had just assumed that the two of you had been too busy with work to be all sentimental together. And just when would that damn wedding be, anyway? They couldn't be expected to keep their schedules open for years and years while you and Sherlock kept sorting it out!

"There are more important things going on right now," you burst, frustrated. Not that you were at liberty to discuss them, but Charles Augustus Magnussen threatening the lives of those you loved seemed a bit more pressing than figuring out which melodramatic 90s songs to play while the guests were too drunk to notice.

Speaking of the great Swede, Sherlock had done his best to fill you in on what was happening, though you only grew nauseous at the reminder that you'd stumbled upon him by accident and had very nearly spoken with him. Maybe it was for the best! If you were in your "right state of mind," you mind have shot him right then and there (and then, of course, you would have gotten shot yourself, but it would have saved everyone so much trouble…).

Before too long it was Christmas, and though you were planning on visiting your family as a way of dodging the awkwardness that would accompany John and Mary together for Christmas. But at least it gave you a chance to visit Sherlock's parents, who relaxed you with their normalcy. (The day before you'd met them, you'd spent hours on the Internet, trying your best to learn literally everything about everything in case they thought you to be too stupid for Sherlock; you ended up talking with them about the therapy of knitting)

"I can't believe you believe you brought him along," you muttered to Sherlock with some contempt as you entered his parent's house.

"Believe me, I'd stop Mycroft from coming if I could."

"Not him! *Wiggins.*" You glanced up to see the man in question looking at you, and you gave him a wave with forced enthusiasm. "Why is he even *here*?"

Sherlock looked offended that you'd even question his planning. "He's a perfectly competent chemist. Who else could I trust to drug my family?"

"How long have you *known* him?!" You stopped yourself and shook your head. "Why do I bother? You're hardly a good judge of character."

"*Hardly?* It was *you* I wanted to marry."

"I…" Warmth spread over your cheeks. "Oh! I love you too, but I hope you have another Christmas present for me this year. Sentiment is lovely but I wouldn't mind a nice scarf…"

Still, your good feelings could only last so long. It was impossible to get your usual warm, snuggly Christmas feelings with the knowledge that Sherlock was going to leave in a matter of minutes to face yet another adversary. It felt like Moriarty all over again, but even worse; you felt even *more* damned helpless. Moriarty had practically been insanity incarnate, and yet even he had fallen to a bullet that could have been yours. But with Magnussen, it felt as though he existed on a separate plane of existence, pulling strings from some distant cloud.

Sherlock had told you about his plans, making an effort to include you in contrast to when he'd desperately tried to keep you out of the Moriarty mess. You thought it'd make you feel better, yet somehow you felt worse; you felt like a partner who was failing him. But what could you do to pull your own weight? You'd been out of the loop for this business, thanks to Sherlock pretending to break up with you. You hated feeling useless, and you hated feeling as though you couldn't do anything for someone you loved. In short, it was the shittiest you'd ever felt at Christmas, even including the holiday that had been tainted by Irene Adler's presence.

You excused yourself to go to the bathroom, and when you returned you found just about everyone to be unconscious. The fact that you knew it was going to happen didn't make it any less disturbing for you to be tip-toeing around a bunch of drugged individuals. Uncomfortable with just sitting down (you couldn't stop staring awkwardly), you stood and wandered over to where Sherlock was stealing Mycroft's laptop.

"You should have drugged me too," you complained. "I shouldn't have to tell you how worried I am right now. Being unconscious… At least I wouldn't have to worry about you."

"I'll come back," he promised you, albeit in that Sherlock-way that intended to make you feel foolish for even *suggesting* that he didn't know absolutely everything that he was doing. "Don't I always?"

You scoffed. "Well, don't take years and years this time."

"Doubtful. Of course, I know you're still young, but you're not getting *younger,* and as for the health of your ovaries, I…"

"…am not a doctor and I won't pretend to be one," you interrupted quickly, not wanting even the unconscious to get the wrong idea about your reproductive system. "Isn't that what you were going to say?"

"What?! It's not as though it's *unreasonable*–"

"Merry Christmas, Sherlock!" you said, as if to remind him. And then, in contrast to your earlier reluctance, "Don't you have someone to confront, sweetheart?"

You went to hug him goodbye as usual and were surprised at reciprocation, at being held for a moment by him. He usually only succumbed to your affections at rare moments. Was it because it was Christmas, or was he just concerned? *Well, that would make two of us.*

You watched him leave with John and turned back to the house. It was chilly and you were eager to get back inside, though there you were met by Bill, who you'd almost forgotten about.

"So," he said, looking a bit eager for a conversation with you, "how do you feel about ska?"

"…I'll, uh, be outside."

You waited for Sherlock, ignoring the cold and not minding the time that passed. You weren't sure how long he'd be gone, yet every minute felt like an eternity. But why? What made Magnussen any different from Moriarty? Sherlock had come back from Moriarty. Magnussen surely had to be a sort of silver-medal villain in comparison to the consulting criminal…

The cold was beginning to feel unbearable, and you went back inside. After admitting to Bill that you were woefully uneducated in the subject of ska, you heard the unconscious begin to stir and panicked. Would you look implicit? Technically, you'd done nothing! But you remembered that Sherlock had taken something from Mycroft and the last thing you wanted was to be known as an accessory, ending up on a watch list for the rest of your life (though you sometimes suspected that you already were).

When Mycroft awoke you had adopted a position of exaggerated sleep. You lay face down on the sofa, your limbs splayed as you tried to lie as absolutely still as possible. You heard shuffling and stirring, and, as Mycroft realized that his laptop was gone, obscene cursing that you'd never heard from the elder Holmes brother.

"*Sherlock!*" You let yourself be "awakened" by the infuriated call, jolting to a sitting position and looking around in confusion.

"What? What's happened?" you asked, doing your best to fake bemusement. "Wow! It appears I was… entirely unconscious for the most recent series of events."

"That idiot's with Magnussen," you heard, and it seemed to come from very far away. "I need to go there *now.*"

"Where?" you asked no one in particular, hoping to pad your innocence as much as possible.

Mycroft had been the first to rise and all of a sudden there was movement, motion and sound *everywhere*, all coming from just one man. You looked up to search for Wiggins but found no one around; had he fled to protect himself? *Maybe I should take a page from his book.* But Sherlock was supposed to be back soon… You couldn't leave him to Mycroft's wrath all by himself, even though you were terrified of it yourself.

The elder Holmes brother was making calls and gathering up forces. You wondered if it would be possible to worm your way into the helicopter that he was calling, or at least find a way to Appledore by riding on a bicycle or something, but what would be the point? Sherlock must have already won by now. Unless something went wrong, but what was the point of pessimism? You always had so much faith in him…

…and then you got a call– You weren't even certain who it was from at first, and truth be told you never figured it out– And he was saying that *Magnussen is dead, Magnussen is dead. Sherlock killed Charles Augustus Magnussen.* Suddenly everything seemed to open up before you, as if you had broken into the mainframe of reality itself and your future was in front of you like a kaleidoscope: a wedding between you and Sherlock, a honeymoon that Sherlock had scheduled around a case that was more pressing, nights together, ugly sweaters knitted, criminals caught, children born. It seemed so *far* away from you, as if they were all slipping away, your future with Sherlock Holmes, consulting detective, ruined with a single bullet.

You weren't allowed to see him. That was probably the worst part, which was saying a lot. You couldn't call him or even slip him a message. (Who would you be trying to bribe? *Mycroft?* Try bribing a mountain!) The very least the Holmes brother could do was tell you what the hell was going on, if only to relieve you of your incessant paranoia. Your dreams, usually ridiculous and nonsensical, became filled with death. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if it was your death, since it meant you would wake up to find yourself intact, but it was Sherlock's, always Sherlock's death, and when you woke up you were never quite sure whether or not it was prophetic.

When you were finally able to see him, about a week and a half into January, it was at an airfield. It didn't take much deducting to figure out that you wouldn't be reunited with him any time soon.

You were the first to fly out of the car, not exactly the pinnacle of British stuffiness as you tearfully raced up to your fiancé. Ordinarily he'd never embrace you in front of Mycroft, which was understandable given the latter's propensity to be cruel, but right then he opened his arms so that he could catch you. And perhaps the most unfair part was that the gesture made you certain that you weren't going to see him for a long time.

"They wouldn't let me see you," you bemoaned. "Not even for a conjugal visit. Or several conjugal visits. That has to be some kind of torture."

"You're associated with a murderer," he reminded you, as if you both hadn't killed people without much guilt before.

"You say that like it's something new."

"Has this happened before?"

You looked at the plane and decided that, no, it hadn't. "Sherlock… When am I seeing you again?"

It wasn't a question so much as it was a test. You knew him well enough to know when he was lying or evading or hiding something. Sherlock Holmes was usually either brutally honest or a lying bastard, depending on the situation, but it worked because you usually liked the truth in whatever packaging it came in. Except then, with him so close to leaving you, all you wanted was a reassuring lie.

"It's just enough to redeem myself. I'll be back in a matter of months." And you knew from every part of him that it was a lie.

"When will you be back?" you pressed. You'd wanted to hear that he'd return to you soon, and yet… And yet, you feared that this time his death wouldn't be faked. "Sherlock, what's going to happen to you?"

"I…" But then John and Mary were close, and Sherlock resumed a stance of security. Whatever the truth was, he didn't feel comfortable enough to share it with his best friend, either. It terrified you and you barely even knew what was going on.

When it came time for final good-byes you held him so tightly that you were practically flattened against him, trying to memorize him the way he'd memorized you the night before he faked his death. And then you had to use up your final public kiss. You kissed him with such uncensored, unadulterated, undiluted fervor that when you separated you were certain that he could have taken the opportunity to flee; not even the security guard could look at him without reddening and clearing his throat.

*Be safe,* was all you could beg of him. "I really love you, you know."

"Human error," he assured you. "Isn't that what I always told you?"

You made a face. "No. I can remember you getting spectacularly goopy on more than one occasion, actually."

"Worse things have happened."

"Like losing your husband."

"You'll have John and Mary," he said in a struggle to make you feel better, as if you could sleep with either of them. "That is, if you've gotten over wanting to shoot the latter."

"Oh, Sherlock! You know we're friends again. We made you and John dinner together just a month ago…" But somehow none of this seemed to be what you wanted to say, not because it wasn't important, but because you had such a tiny amount of time to say a lifetime of fond words that you had been trying to save for him to last for decades, decades that you clearly didn't have anymore.

"Sherlock," was all you could say. Your voice was about to break and it wasn't the way you wanted him to remember you. "Oh, Sherlock– What can I say?"

Sherlock could only smile at you then, and in that smile was more than words could ever tell you. It was *I love you*, it was *my darling girl*, it was an assortment of every sentimental word that the English language offered that he himself was unable to say. It had fascinated you whenever you saw how artists could convey such serious emotional depth with a single small detail in a painting, and so it did not surprise you that such a comparatively small action could convey in you such a torrent of love and anguish and fear and hope and distress. If you could only put such feelings into words, perhaps you could have composed the greatest opera. Yet you were left silent as you watched Sherlock leave you, getting steadily farther away as he boarded the plane.

You stood beside Mycroft as you watched the plane take off. You didn't cry, surprisingly; your mind was going at a mile a minute. John and Mary were under the impression that Sherlock would return, and you couldn't worry them. And either way, Mycroft Holmes was too powerful a man to be swayed by leaky eyes.

"There he goes," you mused, watching the plane disappear into the sky. "Incredible. You take away my husband-to-be not once but twice. And I thought you'd be a decent brother-in-law, if not *tolerable*."

"You shall be taken care of," he replied stiffly, not wanting to look at you either out of guilt or because such a thing might annoy him. "I promised you a wedding gift, didn't I? You'll be financially secure, I promise that."

"You'd better up the care package, then. I'm not exactly eating for one anymore."

Silence for a minute, before Mycroft's head snapped around to look at you. Horror overtook his expression as the meaning of your words became clear, and he couldn't decide whether to look at your stomach or your face. The former seemed flat enough, though conditions of this sort were often deceptive. The latter was unreadable, though there was some distant, spiritual glint to your eyes, the esoteric wisdom of women who've learned that they had a life inside of them.

"Y-You…" Mycroft could barely spit the word out. Shooting a look over to the Watson to make sure they hadn't heard, he lowered his voice to an indignant hiss. "You do realize that this means… That you're carrying the child of a convicted criminal, of a *murderer* who made himself an enemy of the government itself on *Christmas?*"

"Well…" You frowned, narrowing your eyes a bit in thought as you weighed his words. "Well–!"

"*Well?*"

"Well," you said, squinting up as you tried to place exactly where Sherlock's plane was at that exact moment. "Children."

Mycroft Holmes looked as though he were about to explode and excused himself to his own private car. Would it be enough to bring your fiancé back? You weren't sure. In your experience, there was no limit to reality's cruelty. You looked to where Mary and John were still looking out, holding hands. Your own hands felt cold and you shoved them into your pockets.

You had been planning to speculate more, to look out coldly over the horizon and reminisce on the good times with Sherlock, but it looked as though you wouldn't have much time. Mycroft had left his car, claiming that something wasn't possible. You shot him a suspicious glare. *That is simply not possible.* After everything that had happened, could he really say such a thing with a straight face?

"What is it?" you demanded, rushing up to meet him. "Who are you calling?"

"There's been a change of plans," was all Mycroft could tell you. And then, into the receiver, "Hello, little brother…"

In retrospect, you should have felt overjoyed, but you felt pissed that you were expected to go through all this emotional turmoil within the span of a few short minutes. "Seriously! What in the *fuck* is going on…?"

The answer to your question was extremely important, but even *more* important was the sight of Sherlock's plane landing mere minutes after it had taken off, threatening to carry him off forever. You immediately abandoned your quest of figuring out what the fuck was going on, but since you assumed a man can only shoot himself in the head once, you could never have guessed that Moriarty was back. And you didn't know Moriarty was back. You'd been paying too much attention to the idea of your sent-to-his-death fiancé returning. If you had known that Moriarty was back, you probably would have waited like a dutiful citizen until everything was explained. But you weren't dutiful; you were outraged, and self-righteous, and a human being with needs.

"For just five minutes," you promised, "Even *you* can wait five minutes, damn it!"

So you took it upon yourself to stride onto the plane unannounced, ordering everyone else off of it so that you and your husband-to-be would be alone for a moment. Sherlock looked up, presumably expecting to see his brother, only to find you ripping your panties off and tossing them aside.

"Oh–!" It was always satisfying to catch the consulting detective off-guard. Luckily, he was also the type to recover quickly, and by the time you reached him he had already undone his belt.

You had promised Mycroft only a five-minute delay, but the hectic energy between you and Sherlock as you rode him meant that it was physically impossible to go longer than just a few minutes. You had missed weeks of conjugal visits, true, but you wouldn't have traded the world for the absolute relief you had to have him inside you again just *briefly*, to know that he was back and that there was no way you would let him be separated from you again.

The two of you stayed there for a minute more to catch your breath, you still astride him and balancing carefully against the seat. What you'd gone through was pure fucking, absolutely animalistic, yet you couldn't help but smile warmly down at him. With a sigh you wrapped your arms around him and pressed his face against your chest, feeling the warmth of his breath against your breast as he relaxed.

“Oh, I know it’s selfish,” you admitted, not entirely sorry about it. “England being in danger again, for whatever reason, but…”

“I wasn’t inclined to complain.”

“Well, it was his own fault, keeping me away for you forever.”

“How’d you get past him, anyway?”

“Pfft…” You shrugged, remembering your bold “confession.” “I told him I was pregnant, and can you believe it? That didn’t sway him at all… Though apparently he was going to make me a rich almost-widow. Optimistic.”

“You *what*?”

“Nah, I’m not pregnant. He might have deduced it, had the gravity of the situation not been so– you know. Managed to make him speechless for a moment, though. You would have been impressed. You know how it is… *What an artist!*”

An overwhelming feeling overtook you and you ran a hand through his dark curls. You *had* to say it, and to hell with everything else! “Sherlock…”

“Hmm?”

“We’re having the damned wedding.”

“Were we not before?”

“Not with your *suicide mission*, no.”

“Almost forgot about that.”

“I mean, by all means, let’s figure out what the hell is going on first…”

“Absolutely…”

“But if we put it off until whatever’s going on is over, there’s going to be something new, and we’re both going to be too old to go on a honeymoon. So please, let’s just get fucking *married* already…”

“Agreed.” But that word seemed far too clinical for the sight of you still on top of him, still around him, threatening to turn your promised five minutes into at least eight or nine. “Yes. Oh, *yes*.”

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# Chapter 53: Le nozze di Sherlock Holmes, atto I

**Author's Notes:** out of all the improbable things to happen in this fanfiction i think planning a wedding in a couple of weeks is the most improbable but here we are

also, since my semester is ending in just a couple of weeks, i finally have time to write this among other things (as i speak to an empty room)

so you'll be happy to have a definite schedule for the ending of this fanfic: chapter 54 will be posted on **Christmas** (eve or day or around there) with the final chapter 55 on **New Years** (eve or day or around there) .... *clear as usual, i know*

also since rea-tan's name is always up to you, i took some artistic non-liberties and declined naming her siblings. "but mozart that's lazy--" not if i say it isn't

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*Your fiancée will die.*

So went the note that had been slipped under the door to 221B. It had been left when no one was home, and bore no fingerprints or distinctive marks. Nothing about it seemed angry or hateful: it was written in Verdana font, the typeface small. And it arrived on the day you started planning the wedding.

“Wow! That’s dumb,” you decided once Sherlock showed it to you. “Everybody dies someday. That’s not a big surprise to me.”

“Someone’s made a threat on your life,” your fiancé told you, not as a remark of panic but as an observation.

“So? I’m *your* fiancée. I’ve gotten loads of these… at least, to this effect. But I don’t have time to worry about it now… I have reading to do.”

In your time with Sherlock Holmes, you had read a lot of literature. You couldn’t remember the exact titles, but they went something like: *How to Obliterate Someone (And Not Leave a Trace)*, *Poisoning for Morons*, *Baby’s First Knife Collection*, and so on. Those had all been interesting reads to you, and once you’d gotten through *The World Reference on Shell Casing: A Fanatic’s Edition*, you thought you’d be able to sit through anything.

Apparently not. Your current chance was not a reference book on tobacco ash or a comprehensive overview of lacerations. Rather, what sat in your lap was a giant tome of wedding planning, and you were already daunted. There were so many rules about picking dates, when to send out invitations, how to get a good photographer… That seemed so basic, yet you had trouble remembering it all. And worse, when you opened up the bridal catalogue you bought at the store, it was all Greek to you. How to skip meals leading up to your wedding without getting ill! Thirteen dresses to flatter your pudgy bits! Formulae about how to put together a perfect wedding playlist! You were dazzled. Sherlock had his own “areas” that he didn’t understand, and perhaps these were yours. Oh! It was so much easier when all you had to worry about was how much ammunition to bring with you on a case!

Daunted, you called up your sister. You figured that sisters were invented to deal with these sorts of things, not like *you* had been any help with hers.

“Whoa, hey,” she answered once she picked up, her accent rough and eager. Her husband was an American, and his dialect was beginning to seep into her speech whenever she got too excited. "I heard you and Sherly are finally tying the knot after, what, fifteen years? And hey, I was *so* glad! I thought you had it without me when I wasn’t looking.”

“Eloping would be easier,” you admitted, staring at the thick tomes of bridal magazines before you. “Listen, I need your help with figuring out some of these logistics…”

“*Figuring out?* What, is this a murder mystery?”

“Well, maybe. I’ve already had a threat on my life and it’s barely noon.”

“Then it already has more pizzazz than my own wedding, hey. Speaking of which–”

“Seriously, I need help–”

“That’s what I *mean*. I let my mother-in-law *completely* lord over my own wedding and it was *so* bland. I had a billion ideas of what I would have liked better. So, uh… I more or less have your entire wedding planned out.”

You paused. You couldn’t believe it. You’d had a whole spiel planned out for convincing her to help shoulder some of the burden of wedding-planning, but this was something completely different. “…Really?”

“One condition, though…” She was your sister, and immediately you heard the slyness in her tone, poorly masked by feigned indifference.

“…What?”

“Brother-dearest and I have to meet him.”

“No!”

She was getting pushier, more excited, already planning out a meeting that you never agreed to. “At the same time!”

“*No!*”

“It’s only fair.”

Despite being on the phone, you shook your head as if to add force to your rejection. “I mean it. He’s not ready for it.”

“He killed himself! Well, briefly. I saw it on the telly! He’s ready for anything.” She gave a huff of displeasure. “Besides, it’s our *right*. He’s going to be an in-law. I have to know if he’s for real.”

You were tempted to say no, but you needed her to help you with planning, and you supposed that they’d have to meet sometime anyway. You’d put it off long enough, obviously; surely any other person would have introduced their fiancé to their siblings a little sooner than immediately before the wedding. But how would it turn out? You could only imagine the worst. Your siblings had always been pretty rough-and-tumble with your boyfriends, prodding and poking and driving them insane just for laughs. And if Sherlock turned into a cornered badger, then there was no telling what would happen to your family! But at the same time, they'd only hate it and protest if they weren't able to see him at least once...

“Fine,” you said grudgingly, already regretting your decision. “But no bullying him! The last thing I need is a big cross-family spat at the last possible minute.”

“I thought you said you had a threat on your life? I’m sure you should be worrying about that instead of whether or not our brother and I will be prodding your fiancé!”

Well! She wasn’t wrong. With Moriarty apparently back in town, you wondered if you should be taking your own death threat more seriously. After dating Sherlock Holmes for so long, you forgot that most people didn’t have to deal with such things. But at the same time, someone who never dated Sherlock Holmes would have no idea how bland such threats became after repeated reiteration. A few months before his suicide incident, you were practically getting one every other week. You took to collecting them, starting a modest collage as a piece of post-modernism.

With a sigh you hang up. You promised her that she and your brother could meet Sherlock as soon as she flew in to help you with all the plans. You had wanted a wedding put together as quickly as possible, and your sister promised to not disappoint. She was taking some time off of her work to help you plan, which meant that she could devote 100% of her energy to planning the wedding, just as she wanted. You weren’t certain if that was a good or a bad thing just yet, but you figured that any help was better than you bemusedly staring at some wedding reference books from the library.

When you found Sherlock, he was still examining the threatening letter. “Honestly, I can’t believe this.”

“What’s not to believe? With all the ones I’ve collected that have been intended for you… I could probably make a scrapbook out of it.”

“No; I mean, the cardstock.” He rubbed the paper between his fingers appreciatively. “It’s excellent quality.”

“Incredible. Thanks for the input.”

“I mean it. What sort of assassin has such an eloquent taste?”

“I hope it’s mine. I’d rather be killed by a man of wealth and taste than, you know, some grungy homeless person.”

He turned to you surprise and actually looked offended. It took you a second to realize the sincerity of the expression. “Don’t be prejudiced. I’m inviting some of them to the wedding.”

“What? *Why?*”

“Because I read part of your ridiculous encyclopedia on wedding etiquette, and it said that it was polite to invite employees…”

“They’re not on your payroll.”

“Absurd. And besides, Wiggins is your friend, remember?”

“*No*. Sherlock, I thought you didn’t want to have anything to do with the guest list?” Exasperated, you threw up your hands. “What happened to those narcissistic speeches about not needing anyone but yourself? They could come in handy right now, for planning’s sake.”

“I also stated before I met you that marriage was the least interesting concept in the world to me, so I’m sure anything beyond that is unremarkable in comparison.”

“I…” Remembering why you were talking to him in the first place, you shook your head. “Actually, put whoever you want on the list… Hopefully we’re only getting married once. But, Sherlock, listen…”

“Hmm?” As usual, he appeared to only be somewhat invested in the conversation.

“Sherlock…” You slid closer to him, dropping your incensed mood entirely to adopt a sultrier one. It would be necessary in difficult requests such as these. “Can I talk to you about something?”

He had catalogued that tone of voice to mean something dangerous, but even under the layers and layers of cold indifference he was still a man, and very much a fallible human when it came to you. Disarmed, he could only ask, “What is it?”

“You’re an enigmatic guy, right, Sherlock?” You stroked a hand through his dark curls, making a conscious effort to make your seduction come off in waves. “Lots of people are curious about you…”

“Uhm, yes… I suppose that they might be. With that meaningless media exposure, and everything…”

“Mhm, of course… And of course, there are certain people who are extra curious about you, since I know you, and they know me, but they haven’t had a chance to meet you. And it’s not like they’re strangers… They care about me, and they just want to get a feel for who you are. …Do you follow me?”

He probably could have figured out what you were trying to say, had he been in his right frame of mind, but he was always so easily seduced that his brain was briefly befuddled and he was still guessing. “And that means…?”

“Well… Honey… My brother and sister want to meet you.”

Maybe it was a bad idea to only relay stories about your siblings’ casual cruelty and teasing, and to do it in such incredible detail, because you could visibly see Sherlock’s brain shut down. You had a flashback montage to the time you told him about when they had made sure to gaslight a fellow student who had been bullying you, or when they’d made a shockingly convincing show to pretend as if you’d been dead for years in front of a gentleman caller whom they didn’t like, or the time that they had nearly managed to embezzle a thousand pounds from a woman who had failed to pay back a few quid to your sister ten years ago.

“Sherlock!” He had been unresponsive for almost a minute. Shaking him gently, you cried, “Say something!”

"Is it…" He swallowed sharply. "It isn't too late to be wed in a small and nondescript shack in the middle of nowhere?"

"I wish it wasn't," you said, thinking back to the thick tome for wedding planning that had driven you to call your sadistic sister in the first place. "Sherlock, it'll be all right. I've already got a threat to my life… How much worse can my siblings be?"

"Much worse. I'm not as familiar with their attack patterns."

"Oh, honey! I'll be with you the whole time if they plan on doing anything."

"You mean that you already consider me to be in poor position with them?"

"What? No! I mean, I'll be there as a safety net…"

That seemed to assure him even less, and he went back to being unresponsive. You felt terrible. The last thing you wanted was to add even more anxiety, so close to a day that drove the average man and woman absolutely mad. Even worse was the fact that part of you had assumed that Sherlock would have been rather blasé about the whole affair, as it was merely an event so that the populace at large could confirm how he already felt about the two of you. You had thought that he might have not even known the date until the last few days leading up to it, letting you do the heavy lifting in terms of planning. That was unfair to him; of course he cared about the impression he made on your family. Even if he cared a single iota, the most minimal amount of care that he could possibly summon with that incorrigible nature of his, it was still more than he did for most people in the world.

"You'll be just fine." You were trying to assure him, as well as yourself. You turned on the silky nature you'd had before, except this time you did it to soothe rather than seduce, taking a seat on his lap to pull him close to you. "They're grown up now, Sherlock. What I told you about them– That all happened when we were kids, that's all. And it was just because they care about me, for better or for worse. They'll be able to tell in a second that you're good to me."

He didn't seem entirely convinced, but he agreed to a meeting. Your sister and brother would arrive soon, and until then you did your best to work on the wedding plans. You figured that you could do some of it yourself. The guest list was surprisingly short thanks to Sherlock's lack of care about cultivating meaningful relationships, and you were relieved about not having to pay for a massive bash, though you were constantly getting requests to be added to the guest list from co-workers who were shocked that the wedding was actually happening.

After an afternoon promenade with your husband-to-be, you were lounging around his flat, trying to figure out how your hair would look on your big day. You were clad in only a bathrobe when you heard a knock at the door.

"Sherlock?" you called. "Can you get that?"

"No," he answered succinctly, even though he was dressed and you weren't. You had no idea what he was doing. For all you knew, he was staring at a wall.

"Sherlock," you began to protest, but before you could go stomping over to demand he open the door, the knocking got louder and harder. For a harrowing moment you thought that the police were trying to bust down your door, as that was the exact urgency and intensity of it all. It was non-stop pounding, and you wondered if it was not police at the door but drug lords looking for Sherlock's late payment on drugs, or something.

You hid behind a chair as you watched the door, waiting for Sherlock to appear and answer it. He didn't, naturally; maybe he thought as you did and chose to ignore the insistent callers. You were prepared to do the same when the knocking doubled. It didn't sound like one person using both of their fists… No, the rhythm was off, and the sound was different. No… It sounded like two people!

The color drained from your face. It couldn't be your siblings — they weren't due for another couple of days — so who else could it be, pounding on your door like that? It had already gone on ceaselessly for two whole minutes. You wished you were wearing some more clothes… It was hard to feel bold in a fluffy white bathrobe. At the very least, you wanted your gun, but that was on the other side of the flat. If someone did manage to kick your door down, you'd be completely defenseless.

*What if they're here for Sherlock?!* Then you couldn't let him answer the door! Emboldened by the thought of defending your fiancé, you stood up boldly from your crouching position and marched over to the door, lingering in front of it with your hand on the doorknob. Insane thoughts brought along by adrenaline made you envision you standing there, your body ridden with bullet holes, using your dying breaths to warn Sherlock of his enemies.

*But what if they're here for you?* You did get the message that you were going to die. Maybe they knew you were without trousers and wanted to get the jump on you before you had time to slip into a skirt and kick their asses. Then so be it! You'd give them a full frontal assault!

Ripping the door open, you filled your lungs with breath in preparation to yell a warning to Sherlock. In a second you realized that there was no real threat, no gunmen or kidnappers or assassins, but you felt like screaming for him to escape out a back window anyway.

Your siblings had arrived early.

"Hey, sis!" your brother greeted cheerfully, though they both looked surprised. "What are you doing here, anyway? This is where Sherlock lives."

"We didn't expect you," your sister added boldly, raising her head high.

"You thought you'd get the drop on Sherlock while I wasn't around!" you cried, scandalized that your siblings had deliberately tried to be so underhanded.

"Yes," your brother agreed, trying to push past you into the flat. "So where is he? He is in, isn't he? Wow! I hope we're not interrupting anything."

"I am," your sister offered. "Men are the most vulnerable when they just get off of a round of passion. I mean, I don't actually know, but that seems to happen a lot in the books I read."

"Can't you just come back later?" you protested, trying to push both of them back at once. "Look at me! I can't even receive you properly. I'm barely dressed."

Your brother was still trying. "Wow! Who cares? We all rocketed out of the same vagina, didn't we?"

"Not *you*. You were extracted like some kind of carnival game."

"Well, you're not wrong. But that doesn't change the fact that we're completely ready to see this enigmatic Sherlock Holmes…"

Sherlock himself was not deaf, and he heard the voices of your siblings immediately the moment they greeted you. Though you hadn't had time to yell out a warning him, he nevertheless existed on the same wavelength as you and had already stood to push a window open and stare out of it forlornly, judging the distance to the ground. But for all of his desire to escape, he knew that he couldn't flee and abandon you, leaving you to entertain his siblings while he cavorted and waited for them to leave.

"I'm here," he called out, and though you heard understandable reluctance in his tone you almost collapsed from gratitude of not having to deal with your nosy siblings on your own. "I see that the brood has arrived early."

"It's him!" your brother exclaimed, nudging you in the side. "I can't believe it! The great consulting detective, in the flesh! I'll never forgive you for not showing him off earlier."

Before you could pull them back they circled around him eagerly, not even touching him but nevertheless suffocating him with their presence, observing him, and when they spoke they barely seemed to be addressing him directly.

"Seriously, could you tell that I was a C-section baby, right away? Is that a thing? Can you do that?"

"Oh, shut up, you can't tell things like that. Right? Could you tell that he could totally have killed Macbeth if he wanted to? No, wait. You should be able to deduce that he hates reading, or anything else that stretches the imagination."

"Shut up! Well, what else can you deduce about me? Ooh! What did I have for lunch today? Wait, that's so easy. What's my shoe size?"

"You dumbass, that's not hard either. You're not being imaginative enough. Here; what's my husband's height?"

"You always have to make everything about you! We haven't even introduced ourselves."

"Oh, but hasn't our dear sister already done that for us? I read that he's bad with names so he might have forgotten. My name's–"

"Wow! Aren't we so tiny in comparison to him? It's like remembering the name of an ant on the sidewalk. You can just call me Brother-in-Law, and she can be Sister-in-Law."

"Not *yet*. We haven't decided on him yet."

"What's there to decide on? How much better can she do? Hopefully not that embarrassing secretary-man who was twice her age. Or that one guy– With the eyebrows?"

"Who can forget those eyebrows? Hey, remember what we did to that Robert Matheson?"

"It's his own fault for having the name Robert. Wow! I've never liked Roberts."

"Don't be ridiculous. You had a friend name Robert when you were in school."

"Yeah, but I always called him Edgar…"

"That was his *last* name…"

"Shut up, I *know!* I was just trying to *distance* him from that name; You hated it too or else you wouldn't have kicked a ball at that girl named Roberta…"

"She owed me money! That was completely different! Oh, plus she said that I don't look like a 'creative person' based off my handwriting and I'm like, 'want to see me get creative with this football?'"

And so they went on squabbling exciting to the kitchen to seek out some tea, and you stared after them haplessly. They seemed to forget all about your husband-to-be, the focus of their attention just a minute ago. Sherlock, who had barely said a word during the entire time your siblings were there, looked to you for explanation and you could only shrug haplessly.

"It's been a while since they've seen each other in person," you suggested, as that was your best guess. "I think… Well, it might mean that you've passed…?"

Indeed, it seemed so. When your sister came back with a mouth full of biscuits, she said something that was probably supposed to be a joke, and though it came out all garbled because she was still trying to swallow you could have sworn you heard *brother-to-be* in there somewhere and that was that.

"We have work to do," she said when she finally managed to swallow, wiping the crumbs from her cheek. "You can go ahead and sit down, though… Trust me! I've got it all under control."

"Oh– But, I have this big book on wedding planning–"

"I mean it; You don't have a thing to worry about. I was on the plane, and for that whole flight I was figuring out what would work best with what. I know you don't want a gala… In your position, I'd just want to get married, too. But since it overwhelms you one way or the other I feel that I have a lot to offer…"

So you let your sister take the reins as it was your turn to shove biscuits into your mouth. It made you feel better to not have to stress yourself out so much, and to have a wedding planner sister meant that you were at least letting someone you trusted make those basically inconsequential decisions, like how you were going to fix your hair and what color flowers would work best with the aura of the scene.

"You don't find her overbearing?" Sherlock asked you a few days later, incredulous, as you fitted yourself into his lap. "I'm about to seriously consider the reality of cloning, with the way she's everywhere at once."

"Her husband's out on a sales trip until the day before the wedding… She's probably bored," you guessed, snuggling closer to him to bother him. He had enough on his mind; he was trying to replay the memory of you and your brother trading *wow!*s back and forth for practically a minute, trying to decide if it actually happened or if it was just a figment of his imagination.

"So she's not living vicariously through you?"

"Oh, I suppose so, but I don't care… I care a lot more about romantic scenes like this, where we're all snuggly and domestic. Don't you, sweetheart?"

"…You know! You m-might want to ask your brother if he's bringing anyone along with him to the wedding. The faded lipstick smudges on his collar…"

Trying to hide your smile, you pressed your face against his shirt. "Deductions won't get you out of snuggly moments, you know… You're still here."

"I mean it… The shade of it is from a brand that's extremely popular in Leipzig at the moment…"

"Ah! Now I know you're making it up. Aren't you?! Come here…"

The morning you were supposed to try on wedding dresses was the morning you were waiting for. The dress was an important part of the ceremony, right? It was the centerpiece for photographs. Generally, you were expected to keep it around for sentimental value, so you didn't want to be caught staring at something you hated. Plus you saw those shows where the bride tried on a few dresses before finding the perfect one, and you were wondering about what your dreamlike transformation would consist of. You weren't wondering long, though; You were more focused on the fact that you'd be alone for the perfect day.

"What do you mean, you can't come?" you complained to your sister, who was surrounded by ten bouquets of flowers. "You want me to believe that you choosing the font of the poem that's going to be the centerpiece for the tables is more important?!"

"You should be thankful you got that appointment," she chided you, looking up from her magnifying glass. "Normally you'd have to wait weeks in advance, but your wedding is so soon…"

"How did you even *get* it, then?"

"With help from your husband-to-be." She threw a spare pen at Sherlock, who was in the kitchen, also examining font, this time the font of your death threat through a microscope. Nimbly he moved forward to dodge, as casually as if with practice. "Some woman we met. He deduced that she was sleeping with all three of her husband's sons, which isn't justified even if her husband's, like, eighty and she's thirty, you know? They're still her stepchildren. But yeah, you won't be alone."

"What do you mean? Molly has to work, Fran's on vacation, and the rest of them–"

"It's not a lady. Don't be so sexist."

"What?" You tried to count your male companions who would feel comfortable enough to join you at an even that involved trying on dresses for hours on end. "*Who?*"

"Your good buddy Adam Coveney," she replied, not knowing any better. "I ran into him by chance and he mentioned your name. What a small world, eh? He has the day off and he said he'd be more than happy to help you."

You groaned inwardly. The upcoming wedding wasn't exactly doing anything to ward off the presence of Coveney, who, as usual, preferred the company of unavailable women — and the more unavailable, the better. He had been decent to you recently because he liked Sherlock, and you'd been decent to him back because you remembered that he was the one co-worker who hadn't been an asshole about Sherlock's pre-fake suicide issues, but it's not like you were comfortable enough around him to change in front of him or anything.

"It's not like you have to change in front of him or anything," your sister went on. "He's just there to see what looks nice."

"How is *he* supposed to decide what looks nice?"

"Because I wouldn't give you a better answer. Aesthetics elude me, honestly. And Sherlock can't help you because, one, he's not an aesthetic scientist either, and two, it's bad luck for him to see you like that, or something. And I mentioned that to Coveney and he got all excited that he would get a chance to see you before Sherlock does so I think that was fifty percent of his reasoning…" She gave you a sideways glare, the one you were so used to giving to Sherlock. "You're the one who wanted a wedding planned as fast as possible! Don't tell me to put it off!"

It still irritated you but you knew that she *was* sincerely doing her best and you were still impressed that she managed to get you in to a boutique to try on dresses on such short notice. Trying to change the subject, you looked around at the bouquets of flowers around you, wondering why they were even there.

"So what's with those? It looks like you're either being courted by an eager gentleman, or someone's died and they're sending us something for condolences."

"Well, I…" She furrowed her brow and scratched a bit at the back of her neck — a gesture you knew to be a nervous habit of hers — "I actually sort of bought them all."

"…You *bought* a dozen bouquet of flowers? Why? *Why?*"

"First of all, there's only *ten* here; exaggerating was always a big issue with you! Secondly there was a big sale on them and I figured, why not see how they match your complexion in person before I decide on what flowers to get for the wedding?"

"I can see a *picture* of them and know! *That's* how!"

In the face of her mistake she always reverted to deflections. "What! Hey, don't you listen to anything? I said I wanted to see what they looked like in real life. Plus your fiancé kindly let me know how much he makes in a year and I figure he could help shoulder some of the costs."

"I… You know what? Fine." You had just sort of accepted that she couldn't possibly be reasoned with. You snatched up the nearest one, rubbed a petal between your fingers and said, "This one's totally shit. Way too dark. But it'll be perfect for Mum."

"Mom?" She looked away guiltily. "I should go with you. I haven't seen her since I've come over."

"She's not exactly going anywhere, right? Besides, you're busy. I'll just take these over and head on down to meet up with…" It was embarrassing just to say it. "…Coveney."

Sherlock, who generally found graveyards to be a ridiculous place that intentionally evoked sentiment for those who could no longer acknowledge or appreciate it, suddenly stood up from his work, which startled you. "I can go with you. I'm almost done here."

You frowned. "So? You like to work through the end. Really, I'm fine. I was just making a big fuss, that's all. And Coveney isn't so bad… At least he has *one* good joke."

Your sister didn't seem to be listening, still pondering over the best font, but nevertheless he tried to be discreet when he dropped his voice. Although you honestly fooled yourself into believing that he was about to say something sentimental, he was still Sherlock and he said, "I am going to lobotomize myself if I'm here with her another minute. I need to get out of here."

"Oh? Sherlock! She'll be your sister-in-law; to her she already is! But…" You patted his arm and kissed his cheek with the affection of a couple married for decades, which in your mind was true on a metaphysical level. "I can't blame you. Still, I just wanted to go over by myself and take my time. We can go over together some other time… And I doubt the dress thing will last for a while. I'll be right back. Just relax, okay? This planning's putting us both out but we just have to make it through a few more days."

You could tell he was feeling claustrophobic and you were feeling the same way. Your type-A sister would have been a big enough distraction but your brother was here as well and as a result your relationship with Sherlock was forced to the sidelines for, ironically, planning the solidification of it. You'd had no chance to sleep with him ever since your siblings arrived and you had barely even had time to take a walk with him. It did upset you to reject his brief companionship, but you relaxed knowing that within a few days you'd have him all to yourself permanently.

"I love you," you told him, as if you couldn't tell him it enough, compensation for his putting up with pushy siblings. "That's all you need to remember!"

"I…" His gaze slid over to your sister, who had paused from her work to look at the two of you nosily. "…You too."

"Thanks, champ." You gave him a quick kiss and turned to leave, unflattering bouquet in hand. Honestly you did think you'd be right back, and had you been expecting a delay, you would have at least slapped his ass before you left or something, but… Oh! Regrets lasted forever!

The cemetery was within walking distance from your flat, which meant only a short jog from Sherlock's place. When you reached it you knew exactly where your mother's grave was, and you felt guilty at how long it had been since you had last visited and placed flowers. Time gets away from us so quickly and you wished it didn't have to be that way; the last thing you wanted was for strangers to think that your mother was someone who deserved a neglected grave, or that you had been an ungrateful and unloved child.

You put your flowers down and did as much praying as you felt was appropriate for the context. You apologized a bit for taking after your father, making you unable to wear her size-0 wedding dress, but you presumed that, if there was an afterlife, she'd be there watching the wedding from heaven's curved plasma screen. At any rate she was like Sherlock in that she was no fan of sentiment or superfluous emotion, so you didn't stay any longer than you felt necessary and you turned to leave to go to try on dresses. At the last moment — and maybe that was your downfall — you hesitated.

The cemetery was mostly empty and you really weren't rushing to try on dresses in front of Coveney, and so you dawdled a bit, examining graves and calculating how the ages of those who had died. You got sad when someone died tragically young, sadder at a married couple separated early, saddest when grass had covered over the graves. You did your best to brush away leaves and pull away grass but you knew you'd be there all day if you tried to get them all.

You stopped in front of one that was at least somewhat well taken care of. It was a standing marker and seemed recent, and sure enough, the date of death was only a few years earlier. The name on it seemed vaguely familiar but you couldn't connect a name to a face; maybe you'd read the death notice in a paper somewhere and the name stuck with you. At any rate you saw that it was a woman, and a woman who died far too young. She wouldn't have been much older than you and that depressed you; the last thing you wanted to think of was dying so young, before you'd accomplished everything you'd wanted. And it was always an existential crisis to you to see the grave of a stranger, knowing that you never knew their face or smile or personality, that their existence could only be passed down in pictures and the stories of the people who had known them. At least this woman had someone who had thought highly of her, as he or she had shelled out for an attractive gravestone.

Despite her recent death her grave was empty, and for some strange and perhaps spiritual reason you felt a spiritual connection to this woman who was deep in the ground. You went back over to your mother's grave and picked just a few flowers from the bouquet and went back, setting them on top of the stranger's gravestone. Worried that they'd fall off, you picked up a rock and used it to weigh down the stems, and, proud of your work, you brushed your hands off and prepared to walk away.

As you turned, however, you were immediately aware that you had suddenly stopped being alone. Across from you about ten feet away was a man, yet another stranger, though instead of continuing on his way he had stopped dead in his tracks. On his face was an expression of utter shock, like you had just turned to spit on the grave before doing a little dance. You had never met him before and yet it seemed that he knew exactly who you were and was struggling to find the right words to say something to you.

"Am I in your way?" you said, feeling uncomfortable under his gaze. "Oh, sorry… I was just about to leave."

He took a step back from you. You noticed that in his hands was a rather nice bouquet: nothing too big or flamboyant, rather on the conservative and perhaps inexpensive size, but rather attractive nonetheless. He was pivoted towards the gravestone you were in front of and though you presumed he wanted to go to it he kept stepping back.

You frowned. "Is everything all right?"

He didn't respond. The strangest thing was that he simply didn't say anything. He turned and fled without another word, leaving you standing there bemused in front of the gravestone. Your frown deepening, you turned and examined the gravestone once more. Though you expected some big clue to jump out at you, you really didn't recognize the name. The date of death seemed somewhat significant — it had been the date Sherlock had faked his death, which you'd memorized from visiting his not-grave often — but you figured that lots of people died daily and there was nothing inherently cryptic about that.

With that strange incident in mind you headed off to try on wedding dresses. You had read that it took weeks to make alterations to a wedding dress and most women shopped for them ahead of time, but then again, most weddings were planned much earlier in advance than yours was, and really, you were already fucked if you tried to compare your relationship with Sherlock to anyone else's. Honestly you would be happy just walking down the aisle in swan feather lingerie if it meant that the ceremony would be over with. But you were getting a dress paid for, and so, therefore… Nothing left to do but blow a few hours and thousands of pounds on a dress you'd only wear once.

…And thirty minutes later, there was a knock on the door to 221B. No one had been expecting it. You brother had arrived ten minutes before and was supposed to be the only one there until you returned, presumably hours later. Sherlock was impatiently waiting for you since his in-law situation had doubled and the last thing he wanted was a client, but when he made your brother open the door, there was nobody on the other side but — Coveney!

"Hello," he said, inviting himself in and wiping his shoes off. "How's everything?" He noticed your sister, permanently unavailable due to her marital status, and smiled widely. "And how are you, ma'am?"

"Married," she answered laconically, taking a magnifying glass to make sure the font would lie well on the invitation stationary.

"She doesn't like you," your brother noted. "Is your first name Robert, by any chance?"

"You're not supposed to be here," Sherlock snapped, the only one focusing on the matter at hand.

Coveney didn't reply but poked his head around the flat with a frown on his face, looking bemused. To Sherlock it was a natural expression of Coveney's, nothing worth note, but since you were involved he took it more seriously this time. "Coveney, this might come to you as a surprise, but I'm not interested in having you around for decoration; you would be fired and replaced by a fake potted plant. Aren't you supposed to be somewhere?"

It seemed that Coveney was too stupid to understand what was being said to him and he kept looking round, expecting to see someone. After another minute he looked back and frowned even more deeply, totally puzzled. "So she's not here, is she?"

On principle Sherlock didn't rely on gut feelings, though the lurch in his stomach couldn't be ignored. "What do you mean, *she's not here?*"

"Well, that's strange. I thought she might have ditched me. The girls told me that she came in for her appointment but they must have been mistaken…"

Now the flat was silent, waiting for him to come to a point or conclusion, but he just trailed off and rubbed the back of his neck, which made your sister scratch the back of hers. Sherlock waited for Coveney to come to some momentous conclusion but it was apparently too strenuous a task to ask of him.

“She was there,” he said through gritted teeth. “She wouldn’t have been anywhere *but* there. She went over there less than an hour ago. Coveney, where is my *wife?*”

“Well, I…” Then he decided to let the words spill out: he had tried calling you but you hadn’t answered; he had looked around for you in the store but found nothing; none of the attendants had waited on you so they had no clue where you might have gone; and come to think of it, he had sworn he saw someone’s stuff left around, but he assumed it was from another woman’s and so it couldn’t have been yours. At any rate he had waited around for you for fifteen minutes but you hadn’t turned up even though one of the girls insisted that she’d seen you come in and she’d even identified you with a rather crude and laconic description.

“There’s no need to panic, it’s *probably* nothing.” Of course, a sentence like that with the death threat you’d received earlier was not exactly comforting. “But… I can’t find her anywhere!”

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# Chapter 54: Le nozze di Sherlock Holmes, atto II

**Author's Notes:** [does a sick fuckin ollie over the shark] yeah that's me

9k. it's 3:40 in the morning now so i'll edit this ,,,, later

The actual process of going to the boutique was a mystery to Sherlock, and in truth he would never be able to remember the actual process of getting there. For all he knew he teleported there, or perhaps he was carried there on the backs of police at Scotland Yard and deposited neatly on his feet. But no matter his mode of transportation, he nevertheless found himself in a perfumed shop filled with outrageously expensive dresses, a place where overpaid snobs could spend the equivalent of a small country's GDP on a dress they only expected to wear once. A certain sort of person belonged there, but the environment was so incongruous with who *you* were that he could hardly even imagine you traipsing through the racks of dresses. In fact, for a moment, it seemed hardly a mystery why you had disappeared in the first place: it seemed that the universe had liquidated you in an attempt to properly realign itself.

Coveney blustered in there before anyone else, his hands on his hips as he turned from nervous sales associate to sales associate. "Well, what a turn of events this has been!" he declared, though the exclamation didn't seem to make much sense in context. "Any of you remember *me?*"

They didn't, and though he obviously didn't help in any way (no surprises there), it was a comfortingly familiar situation and thus Sherlock felt slightly more at ease. Of course, he was only *slightly* more at ease, meaning that he was so horrifically on-edge that his mind was scrambling to find a deduction for almost literally every single thing he saw. All at once he was deducing the perfume that the nearest worker was wearing, the nationality of another's husband, the income of the last customer to peruse the dress racks. At every turn his brain was making desperate grabs to find some useful clue to make you appear but every time he turned around he found himself face-to-face with nothing more than scared and bemused shop girls.

"You there," he snapped, gesturing to one of the vaguer-looking ones with the loud perfume. "Go stand in the back."

"What? What have *I* done?"

"It's not what you've done, it's what you're doing, and what you're doing is distracting me."

She started to complain about rights and personal dignity and Sherlock was getting increasingly fed up with her. Ordinarily when an ordinary person bothered him, it was a nuisance that could be dealt with in short order, but a wife-to-be on the line made his temper somewhat shorter and he was about to personally take the woman by the hair and swing her around until he could launch her into orbit. Fortunately, she was saved at the last possible moment by the rest of the police entering the building. To Sherlock they had dragged their feet for far too long but in reality they had been lingering outside for maybe fifteen seconds or so.

John materialized out of nowhere to stand beside him, his hands clasped behind his back and a grimace on his face. "Where do you think we should start?"

Sherlock stared at him for a moment. "When on Earth did you get here?"

"What? Sherlock, when you called me I came right away. I've been beside you this whole *time…*" He sighed. "Oh, forget it. Look, I know you're stressed, but there aren't many places she could possibly be, right? This place only has one door as far as I can see."

"This place would need a fire exit," Coveney proclaimed, looking around the boutique with his hands on his hips. "My dad was a fireman, remember?"

"So professional that he taught you buildings need fire exits," Sherlock retorted.

Coveney dove into an explanation of basic fire safety that was actually quite detailed and informative, and though Sherlock himself wasn't listening the rest of the police around the man seemed quite intrigued by the sudden crash course.

Sherlock seemed to be everywhere at once, the urgency of the situation seemingly cloning his intellect and spreading it to each corner of the boutique. It wasn't a big shop, but it was exclusive, and your sister was not wrong in that you lucked out in getting an appointment so soon. One would have easily noticed you walking in and there were no excuse for the girls to have not attended to you; you were probably the only woman in the entire store. Had they snubbed you because they thought you wouldn't be looking for anything expensive? His hatred of the women whose faces he hardly recalled grew exponentially at the mere suggestion of prejudice against you.

"They have security cameras outside," John was telling him, "but, conveniently, they started having trouble with them yesterday and weren't expecting them to be repaired until tomorrow."

"Convenient," Sherlock repeated. His rationality precluded him from feeling too anxious but he nevertheless grew uneasy at the thought of you being led purposefully into a trap. But how? Who would have time to plan your abduction? Everything had been so last-minute…

At last he reached where you had been taken from. He had to think of it as that way; he couldn't possibly think of it as a murder scene. In truth there was little there to suggest it. You had apparently been abducted from one of the changing rooms in the back. Your bag and coat were unmistakable, still piled neatly in the corner on a bench. You must have still had your shoes and clothes on, except for your skirt, which was rather haphazardly sitting on the floor, abandoned. That didn't worry him as much as the sight of your SIG Sauer beside it. It was usually your saving grace and your negotiator and to know that you were without him was making him nauseous.

"The changing rooms lock from the inside," one of the girls told him. She hadn't been invited to his inspection of the scene but had taken it upon herself to come over there anyway, perhaps as a show of compliance. "As you can see, it's a proper little room for privacy and there's no way of getting in from the outside. She should have been fine."

"No locks on the outside?" John asked. "You know, she would always complain about having to ask someone to open a door for her to change. Like asking permission."

A locked room mystery right before a wedding? Like he hadn't had enough of those! He was beginning to get sick of them and this was only the second time!

The girl sniffed. "People who come in here aren't the types to try to smuggle merchandise out through their purses."

Coveney appeared once more, and though Sherlock was prepared to get rid of him as well, he started to say actually useful things, which was perhaps more surprising than your abduction. "But they are the types to be pampered and attended when they come into a bridal store after waiting weeks for an appointment. The only reason you have appointments like these is so the consultants can work with the bride personally. But by all accounts, the future Mrs. Holmes was alone ever since she walked in. Could you tell me more about that, miss…?"

"Sasha," she answered, and though she folded her arms to look more imposing Sherlock could read her anxiety from a mile off. She could hardly swallow and was doing her best to conceal shaking hands. With dismay he realized that she had been the one with the loud perfume with whom he'd verbally grappled earlier, but in the face of capable police the wind seemed to have been taken out of her sails.

"It's not what you think," she went on, glancing quickly at Sherlock. Clearly she read the papers and realized exactly who had walked into the boutique. "We were told to not interact with her. Not for a bad reason or anything. Lotte told us that she wanted to personally handle the lady at first. You know, when most women demand an appointment without waiting their turn, they're usually bridezillas."

He scoffed. That sort of interpretation was so incongruous with who you were that she seemed to be describing an entirely new person. You were the one who would have taken a court wedding if it would have pleased your family, but it wouldn't. "And which one is Lotte?"

"Liselotte. The boss. Manages the store, I mean." Sasha's eyes traveled with his to the wedding dress that was hanging on a rack, ready to be tried on, equally abandoned as the rest of your belongings. If he knew aesthetics better he would have assumed it was good-looking but to him it looked no different than anything else in the store. You might walk down the aisle in a dress made of tape and it would make no difference to him. "That dress… Lotte *must* have spoken with that lady. It's her favorite sample. She doesn't show it to just anyone."

John seemed distracted by something else, and after a moment Sherlock heard it too. Usually the speakers in shops pumped insipid popular music into the ears of whoever was browsing the racks or sitting in the changing rooms as a sort of hip white noise, but he actually recognized the melody of what was playing. And it baffled him that someone had decided to put the tune of "Teddy Bears Picnic" to EDM.

Sasha rolled her eyes. "That's Lotte too. That's the stuff she likes."

The song was nearing its end and jerked into another, a less familiar melody but one Sherlock knew regardless.

"*Fuchs, du hast die Gans gestohlen*," he announced, waiting for the others to catch up without realizing that they probably wouldn't.

"It really doesn't help the investigation when you say deductions in another language," John informed him.

"No, no… It's a song. A children's song. A German children's song, one of the most popular. *Fox, you have stolen the goose.*"

"You're really telling me you don't know we go around the sun, but you've filed away a German kid's song?"

Sherlock whirled around to find that Lestrade had materialized beside the changing room as well. "Why are *you* here?"

"What, me? I was invited to the bloody wedding. Can't exactly go if the bride's missing, right?"

"Liselotte," Sherlock said, now whirling around as if preparing for some sort of transformation. "She was waiting for Liselotte. She wouldn't have left the door unlocked unless she was waiting for someone to come and help her. The wedding is in a few days. She wouldn't have had time to get a designer dress. Would have had to get a sample, something off the racks. Lotte gives her the dress; must have told her she'd be right back to help her get it on properly, maybe for a second opinion until Coveney arrives. Where is she?"

"Lotte? Uh…" Sasha went forward uneasily but Sherlock was already past her with the police and John in tow, returning to where the jittery girls were waiting, now surrounded by police who were sweeping the place. Obviously a slow day if they brought the boys and girls out to look for you, though they probably still owed you for treating you badly before his faked suicide.

He could sort through the workers rather easily. English women were simple to identify and he didn't expect many Germans in a London bridal boutique. But what was the significance of it? She was technically allowed to work anywhere she wanted. And it wasn't like you had any particular connection to the country or anyone in it. And did he have any German mercenaries out after him? None that he could recall…

"You," he said, not sure who he was pointing at. He was looking at her hands. The wedding ring was on the wrong hand for her to be English. "You; you're Liselotte."

"Yes, I am," she replied shortly, folding her arms much like Sasha had, but unlike her underling she didn't seem to be very nervous. On the contrary she seemed irritated by the presence of police in her store, scaring away any lingering customers coming in to look at shoes or jewelry. The last thing she needed was bad publicity for her business, but Sherlock could care less. If something had happened to his fiancée in her store, he would personally ensure that it would never open its doors again.

When they got her alone she maintained her haughtiness, but she did seem somewhat less sure of herself when away from her workers. Still, she held her head high, even when John asked, "Are you usually such a lousy manager?"

Her brows shot up, like she couldn't possibly see how letting a woman get abducted from under her nose made her a bad manager. Her accent was thick, possibly thicker from emotion, but still intelligible. "I have no idea what you mean."

"Besides being ignorant enough to let a kidnapping occur in your store, which isn't exactly big, you haven't maintained any security cameras. And you weren't exactly keen on identifying yourself when the police came in, now, did you? *We* had to seek *you* out, and one of the shop girls was more helpful than you were."

"I help when I am for help asked." She paused. "When I am asked for help. Sorry, I was in school least interested in English. But there was little time for me to help you. That tall policeman of yours… He came in and threw up a fuss, like an irritation."

She wasn't wrong but Sherlock was forced to side with Coveney for this one. "We know that you met with her personally, and that you refused to let the other women help her with looking for a dress."

"So? I thought she would be demanding. I thought she was the one I spoke with over the phone. Every week we get a girl who thinks she can throw her weight around and demand special treatment."

"You run a business giving special treatment. You cater to spoiled women with lots of money. I hardly expect anything less."

Lotte tossed her hair back and shot him a look. She screamed elegance and refined class across every inch of her body, except her eyes, which screamed more "mass murder" than anything. "I give them dresses. I don't coddle them. I gave her the dress, told her to try it on, and left her there. What happened afterwards was not my business."

"Except she wouldn't have had the door unlocked for anyone but you."

“How am I supposed to know if she had the door locked or not? I don’t go testing it for them. And I wasn’t back there. No one was. I left her for a moment and she vanished; that’s that.”

She was a fortress, and though Sherlock was more than ready to practice foreign torture techniques on her, he had nothing else to go on. You had vanished from seemingly thin air and there was nothing in the changing room to deduce. No sign of a struggle, no strange markings or odors, no evidence that you had done as much as sneeze. It seemed as though you had simply walked out on your own.

He left Lotte with the others and went back for a second look, willing that something would just jump out at him. He wished that you had disappeared in a different place. Seeing the assortment of bridal wear and accessories was a bit much and it only served to remind him that a critically important event was at stake if you didn’t turn up in one piece.

Usually, if he didn’t find a lead of any sort — and it was incredibly *rare* for him to not have *any* idea what was going on in a case — he was quick to give it up, not considering it to be worth his time: if Sherlock Holmes could not find a clue, then there was usually none to be found in the first place. But this was about you and he would never forgive himself unless he exhausted himself trying to find you. But no revelations came to him as he stared down the bland white walls of the changing room. He was so out of it that he couldn’t even name the exact shade of the paint. How was he supposed to save you if he couldn’t name the shade of white paint?!

Obnoxious perfume was wafting towards him again and he turned to see Sasha, this time with another one of the girls in tow, a rather trashier-looking one whose appearance was nowhere near the quality of her coworkers’. The new one was less confident than her cohort but did her best to put on a brave face as she looked at him.

“Mr. Holmes, I just learned some information that should be valuable to you. Come on, Karen,” Sasha encouraged, giving her arm a firm shake. “Tell ‘im what you told me and Mr. Watson.”

(Watson! Where did he unlock the power of getting women to talk?!)

“Well, I’m…” Karen cleared her throat and tried to straighten her back. She looked the polar opposite of Lotte but a great deal more compliant. “See, I’m an intern here. Just started working here actually; I wasn’t even supposed to get the job. Not really qualified, you see, but I was really interested in, um, fashion design… And this was really close to my flat…”

“Impressive employment history, but not something that’s critical to me at the moment.”

“No!” she squawked, looking shocked as if she honestly hadn’t realized that she had been rambling, and as an apology she immediately started to spill into another ramble. “I mean, it was intimidating for me. The other girls, they didn’t like me much, and they told me that Lotte was a monster. I was never supposed to make a mistake or she’d terminate the internship. Well, I made it a habit of helping every single customer that walked in. To look like I was going above and all that, you know? Well, I noticed the lady as soon as she walked in. I was going to talk to her but Lotte had us all fixing the front display of the shop. She said it looked messy or something; I don’t know, it looked like it always had. But after a while I didn’t see anything else to be done and Lotte’s wandering around so I didn’t see how she was helping the lady, you know? So I thought she might be distracted and I could make myself useful by going in to help her. But as I’m making my way back to the changing room, Lotte almost screams at me for it. Says that I have no right bothering this lady, and that I’m being obnoxious by trying to hover around her. Well, what was about that? We have to get sales somewhere, you know? But here’s the thing. I heard someone else back there around the changing rooms and I have no idea who it could have been. All the girls were at the front and Lotte was standing in front of me so there would have been no one else there. And it wasn’t the lady’s footsteps either. They were heavy steps. Like a man’s. And I tell you, we rarely get men here. That policeman over there was actually the first I’ve seen in a few days.”

So that was it, then. Assuming Karen was telling the truth — and there was no indication that she wasn’t, she looked like she was going to burst into tears right there — there was proof that your abductor had been waiting for you right outside the door. Had you known? Had you thought it was Coveney, and that was why you had opened the door? Had you accidentally let your own enemy into a tight space with you?

He returned to Lotte, this time with a fact: “So you were lying.”

“What?” Clearly the others hadn’t gotten anywhere with her, as she still had a self-righteous look about her. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“You were *lying*,” he emphasized. “She was not alone. Someone was back there with her. A man. Someone come in for maintenance? No; You don’t want poor women shopping here, so why would you want your image dirtied up by a filthy laborer wandering around? Except, if he were a laborer, he would have come in through the front door, but none of your workers saw him come in so he must have been let in through the back. And you kept them conveniently busy in the front, didn’t you?”

Caught off-guard, the surprise was evident in her eyes until the realization shone through. “That intern has been lying to you, hasn’t she? She just wants attention. She’s not telling the truth. Would you believe that?”

“Really?” John broke in. “Because something tells me that your consultants would say something very different if they were asked what they’ve been doing this whole time.”

“I…” Lotte was losing control fast, her fingers tapping rapidly against her legs as she struggled to find explanations to the accusations.

Sherlock disliked having to rely on people to solve a case: it was so much easier when concrete evidence could be used for deductions. It was harder to lie with fingerprints and blood and footprints, after all, and it was your job and not his to deal with the human element of chaos. But even if he didn’t really want to admit it he had learned a lot from you over his years of being with you and although he still didn’t fully care about people he could piece together their motivations slightly better. “You could have gotten away with it, isn’t that right? Except you weren’t counting on Coveney. She came in alone and you thought you could get away with getting her carried off with no one noticing. No security cameras to prove that she left through the front. Even if one of your workers swore up and down that they never saw her leave, it wouldn’t be too hard to lose a few accessories and claim that she slipped out with them in her purse, because nobody would have checked her — anybody coming in here can afford it, correct? But you were out of time. He showed up and suddenly you didn’t have enough time to make it look intentional. Her belongings were still lying around.”

The power shifted to him and for once no one was stopping him before he got too cruel: it was necessary now. “And now you’re depending on whatever flimsy evidence you have to prove that you weren’t involved, but you didn’t understand who you were dealing with. You *radiate* guilt, Liselotte. You work in a store that’s only open six hours in a day and you haven’t gotten enough sleep in what, months? And I would think that an owner of a high-end bridal store would take better care of her appearance, but you’re not: your mascara has clumps, and your concealer is clearly designed for a time when you had some semblance of a tan. You haven’t bought makeup since a vacation trip, have you? And your clothes are badly fitted, poor form for a woman who makes a living off of fitting clothes for others. I would compliment you on your diet but your weight loss seems unprecedented, unintentional. You’ve been under stress for quite some time now, perhaps losing money despite a pampering career. The German nursery rhymes you play over the stereo system — it’s for comfort, isn’t it? Something familiar, something to distract you from whatever’s going on in your life. Who are you working for? Who did you sell your own customer out to?”

He was used to this chain of events, the typical script. Next she would lean back and fold her arms and say something like *Well that’s an interesting story, Mr. Holmes, but I have no idea what you’re talking about* and he would have to up the ante. Sherlock knew that he didn’t have time to go through those motions. He had no idea what happened to you and every second counted. Perhaps he’d have to pressure her. The police could stand to be useful, maybe threaten her. Maybe he–

“Okay,” she gasped, all the air escaping her like the sigh of cool air before rainfall. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I didn’t want to.”

For a second he actually couldn’t believe she had opened her mouth to be useful, but his shock lasted only a moment. “So you did sell her out.”

“No. No!” Her eyes, which once held such a cutting expression, were round with terror as she looked from him to the other officers. “You don’t understand. He wouldn’t leave me alone. I didn’t want to.”

So it had been a man who was after you. As if he didn’t have enough enemies to think about. Her use of the pronoun game was so irritating that he felt ready to break bones to get it out quicker. “*Who* wouldn’t leave you alone?” He couldn’t actually believe it: “Jim Moriarty?”

Lotte looked ready to cry and looked down, but the name didn’t seem immediately familiar to her. She shook her head.

“Charles Augustus Magnussen?”

He had killed the man only a little while before and currently nothing was beyond the realm of possibility. But she looked confused at the name, not recognizing it, and once more she shook her head.

Sherlock wanted to take her by the shoulders and shake her until her teeth clattered. Who then, *who?* He had enemies, but had he not killed the ones who could have seriously done you harm? Or had he gotten complacent enough to actually believe that you were out of harm’s way? Was it selfish of him to comfort himself with the knowledge that nothing seriously bad would happen to you, that his lifestyle would ensure that you couldn’t go to a fucking shop by yourself without looking over your shoulder?

Or– No, no, what if it wasn’t about him? What if it was an enemy of yours? But you didn’t have any! The criminals you knew were petty ones, ones who would never be able to associate themselves with high-class women and who would never be smart enough to pull off a spotless abduction within the span of fifteen minutes. At least, you didn’t know anyone like that anymore.

*…in Germany where he met his wife…* But what a vague connection that was! Countless Germans lived in England, after all. What were the odds? There was something he’d said about coincidences but he could scarcely remember it. *…in Germany where he met his wife…* And he’d worn his ring on his right hand, too, exactly like Lotte’s. German marriage. Sherlock remembered it perfectly. Impossible to forget a night like that. He’d stood across the room from that man and saw it. Used it to identify him. Brought up his German wife and watched him devolve into a fit of rage.

It was impossible. You had unloaded your gun into his stomach, then once more for good measure. Sherlock had seen the last one happen. One might survive one bullet to the stomach but not half a dozen. Right? Except he knew of children survive gunshot wounds, and years ago he’d read of men survived upwards of fifteen bullets to the body. Was he wearing protection that he kept unseen? Would that even be impossible? He had been bleeding, and you’d stabbed him, after all. But bulletproof vests could protect against bullets while also being utterly useless against stab wounds. Wouldn’t you have known if you had been successful, though? And why was he entertaining such a ridiculous idea? That man hadn’t appeared in years, not since that night. He had probably succumbed to his injuries in some dark copse, his body left for animals to find.

But he still said: “Stanford Stanley?”

It was a name unfamiliar to most of the police, barely familiar to others, and certainly an unimportant name to most civilians who didn’t read the papers or care about current events. It was such a long stretch that he hardly noticed it slip out of his mouth until it happened, and then he regretted it. Until she looked at him with indescribable horror and said, her voice shaking, “How do you know him?”

No. His rationality almost rejected the information outright. There was no possible way that Stanford Stanley could be alive. And even in the absolutely unlikely event that he’d be alive, he wouldn’t wait years to take revenge on you. That just didn’t happen. No one was that patient after an attempted killing.

“I…” Lotte grew even more uneasy at his lack of response and looked to John for appeal, though the latter didn’t appear more helpful. “You don’t understand. You know — I was in Germany born. I met him through my sister. She… I know that he had her killed. The family knew it. We were terrified of him, but not me. Not at first. I went to his house once, to confront him. I could not believe what he had in there. And I became scared of him too. Oh, he got so terrible when some woman — someone from the police — went there. He said he had to get rid of his whole operation, and to England move it. He wanted to kill her so badly. But I heard that he had been shot and I thought that it was safe to move here. But he wasn’t. Men like him don’t die. He came looking for me a few months after I moved. He was in terrible condition. Alive. Someone had been helping him. I thought he had come to kill me but — Mr. Holmes, you don’t understand. He knew everything about me. I didn’t care if he killed me like he killed my sister but I have children. I couldn’t let them be hurt.”

“Then what?” he demanded. “Has he been living with you?”

“No. I did not want him around the children. He lives in — some abandoned place. Some office building. I don’t know where it is. He lived there for a while. Then, that man — Moriarty — they say he shot himself. So I thought he would go away but he didn’t. Just waited. And he talked about you, oh! He wouldn’t stop talking about your fiancée. She had destroyed his business. His livelihood. Moriarty wouldn’t trust him anymore. I don’t know why he didn’t try to kill her while they thought you were dead but he just waited. Maybe he couldn’t find her, not without help. Or he didn’t want to just yet; I don’t know. He was waiting for something.”

“Until Moriarty came back from the dead,” Sherlock finished, the nausea beginning to return, abated only by the need to focus. “Or at least, allegedly.”

“I don’t get it,” Coveney interjected, unsurprisingly words coming from him. “What was going on here, where Stanley was able to pick her up from here? He could have gotten her off the street if he wanted to act a lot faster.”

Lotte could hardly maintain eye contact. “I wanted him to leave me alone. To leave my children alone. I knew he wanted your fiancée. I know another woman, who another bridal shop owns. Who owns another bridal shop, I mean. She complained that some woman was trying to get an early appointment. I asked for her name. To blacklist her in case she tried to get one here. When she said it I thought it was too good to be true. It was her; it had to be her. So I let her get an early appointment. I thought that Stanley would be finished with obsessing over her if he had her.”

Coveney was baffled. “That’s not right. It was her sister that got her the appointment. Something about someone sleeping with… stepchildren or something?”

Lotte scoffed. “Oh, they must have come in to see Samantha. If everyone got an early appointment by guessing that, then we would be dealing with one every two weeks. No; I had her pushed ahead. You don’t understand; it wasn’t personal. I just wanted to be left alone.”

“So you led her back with the most expensive dress in the store and left her there for Stanley to come in through the back.” He wanted to inflict violence just at the thought of it. “She would have been waiting for you. You must have let him in.”

“He didn’t hurt her,” she put in quickly, desperate to convince him. “He just drugged her. No, he didn’t kill her. I don’t know what he wanted to do with her. He was so eager when I told him that she’d be there. Yes, I disabled the cameras. I left her there. I didn’t do anything else.”

“No,” Sherlock agreed. “You left the goose for the fox, and on a silver platter.”

So you’d been drugged. You wouldn’t have gone out without a fight; you’d probably been surprised by the sight of him coming in. Caught with your trousers down, as usual. It would have been quick, silent. No wonder the girls hadn’t heard you. For all he knew, Stanley bundled you in a rug and trucked you out the safety exit without a soul seeing him. And he would have went by completely unnoticed had it not been for the intern’s forced helpfulness.

Sherlock was reeling. Lestrade would have to find an abandoned office building, and London alone had no short supply of them. And that was only if you’d been taken to the immediate area. For all he knew, Stanley had you in transit to Ireland. Or maybe he’d just put a bullet in your head in some back alley and you wouldn’t turn up until someone from the Homeless Network felt like poking around a dumpster.

"He couldn't have gotten far," Lotte exclaimed, frantic to be helpful after admitting to helping a murderer kidnap his most loathed woman. "He doesn't like going out into public. He uses side streets. And he had to carry her himself. He must be nearby."

The rational option would be to go back to try and find evidence of residue that would match up with his established knowledge of debris, but rational options had all but flown out the window in the face of the knowledge that you had been abducted by your mortal enemy. You had probably woken up by now and were terrified once you realized that your gun was gone.

There was only one fire exit — broken clocks, twice a day, all that — and Sherlock was out it in a flash. Lotte could have cleaned the bridal shop of evidence of Stanley, but it would be much harder to go out into some back alley to clean up after a man dragging an unconscious adult around.

What did he want with you, if he had abducted you? Did he want to humiliate you? Make you beg? Was he reactivated on Moriarty's word — was this his way of redeeming himself? Or was he going to torture her, because of him? Would he record it? Sherlock knew that he was clearly not meant to be there. Perhaps this was an entirely selfish act on the part of a criminal pencil-pusher who preferred to do what he was told.

One thing was for certain: Stanford Stanley had been a professional in getting rid of bodies. And if he didn't hurry, it was a certainty that no one would find yours.

His confidence was building and the deductions he made in the alleyways were lightning-quick. Scrapes on the ground from where your heels had scraped the ground, leading the way like a trail of breadcrumbs. Stanley must have noticed, as your shoes were abandoned not far ahead, though he could still tell where your body had made a trail through the grime.

Farther ahead was some fabric from your shirt, and then a rose petal, so pathetically out of place in the disgusting alley that it seemed more a sign of a god than anything. From the flowers you had taken to your mother's grave, he knew: aesthetics eluded him but that detail did not. He was close, so close to you.

The ground was freezing and you must have regained some semblance of consciousness farther ahead, as some boxes had been recently knocked over, not having enough time to make an imprint against the dirty ground, evidence of some struggle that had most likely not ended well for you. Though he willed you into existence directly in front of him, having been the champion of the spat, the trail continued farther ahead, this time with far more obvious indications of your presence: nail marks against the ground, drops of blood from someone's recent wound, some hair he must have ripped out while starting to pull you by your hair. The sudden escalation of violence made him freeze up to the point of paralysis, and as a result he felt someone hit him from behind — not a punch, but more of a bump.

He whipped around, completely prepared to kill, and instead found John behind him. Was movement actually occurring during the day or were people just popping up out of nowhere? "*John?*"

"Yes, actually, I'm still right here," he replied tersely. "We *all* are, and I've been asking you what you've been finding for the last ten minutes."

"Who's *we?*" But sure enough beyond him, the rest of Scotland Yard seemed to be following him like ducklings, waiting for him to continue the pursuit. Apparently whoever didn't go with Lestrade to canvas the area decided to just tag along as a fucking stroll outside.

John assumed his role as the anchor between the two of them and clasped his arm, leading the consulting detective forward down the alley. "Listen, Sherlock, we're all behind you on this one. All you need to do is focus. She's alive; we know that much. There's only one way they could have gone from here. Wherever they are, we'll get her. But you need to relax. It's a lot to ask, I know, but pull yourself together."

He was probably just assuring just to assure but it did have an infinitesimal effect on him. The only best man speech worth saying. Sherlock's mind was cleared once more: the thought of you being dragged along was a simple fact and getting upset about it would do neither him nor you any good. His feet picked up on their own and he was running, running, running in a straight line to the building ahead of him. The only one around, and the only one accessible from the alley via fire escape.

As usual he clambered onto it deftly as John and the others were forced to take the long way around. Beneath him the police were running up the stairs like a little cavalry, though even with all of them he scarcely felt prepared against whatever he was going to find inside the building. The adrenaline pumping through his veins as he realized he was so *close* to you was making him dizzy. It felt as though the abandoned building was speaking to him, as if he could *hear* ghosts speaking in tongues, like the silence was so deafening that he was actually imagining voices.

Until he realized that he wasn't.

The window that led out onto the fire escape where he stood had been completely removed, and thus he could hear everything from inside the building. And what he was hearing was nothing short of a fiery sermon, a fire-and-brimstone homily with nonexistent context. The Stanford Stanley he remembered, the encompassing of the banality of evil, had seemingly ceased to exist. The man he was listening to was a paranoid delusion, a seething god advocating every kind of bloody revenge and genocide and holocaust imaginable. He spoke with the tone of a teacher, a condescending leader espousing Old Testament values of punishment and harsh law on disciples. But no scripture would talk at such length about a dead soul, which was apparently exactly what you were.

It was coming from an upper floor, drifting down from a stairwell to his right. His first impulse was to rush up them like a madman, but when he took a single step the step cried out for mercy underneath him and he withdrew as if he'd been burned. Stanford Stanley likely had you at gunpoint and would not be so receptive to the idea of rescue. He didn't need much motivation to kill you and the knowledge that half a dozen policemen were waiting to arrest him would probably only set him off.

The cacophony was growing louder to the point where it seemed deafening at the bottom of the stairs. Was that a good sign? Did it mean that you were alive? Or was he just ranting at your corpse? No, that was impractical, and even in his throes of delusion, Stanford Stanley was at least a practical man. Though it seemed that he was also an unintelligible one; Sherlock could barely make out what he was saying, as if the syllables weren't quite lining up correctly. It seemed to be in English as before but now in words he could barely make out.

It was all so obnoxious, but he knew that the sermon was at least ensuring that you were still alive. As long as the lecture kept raging on, it meant that you were still an audience, and that was all that he needed. You were just a staircase away. So close, so pathetically *close*. All he needed to do was make it to the top without a sound.

The first step seemed easy, though he quickly realized that he still had about a dozen left to go. By the third he could feel the stress of the stairs threatening to make them squeak under his weight. He turned to see the police still behind him, packed together like frenzied ants at the bottom of the stairs, fighting to get to the first one to follow behind him, creeping together one by one and he grimaced. Did not one of those useless bastards have a smoke grenade that he could use? Why the fuck did no one have a smoke grenade on their person?! *You* would! Twenty quid that you had one in your purse; he should have rifled through it before he left… Ah, John was right, he was so completely out of it — he'd looted from your belongings at least a dozen times before…

Halfway up the stairs. Stanley was still raving on, but there was silence from you. Disconcerting. He wanted you to say *something.* Were you even conscious? Or were you intimidated? Didn't want to set Stanley off? He hated these sorts of possibilities. So tedious, so tiring. Schrödinger's fiancée: you were both alive and dead at that moment. Soon he'd see for certain how you were. Just a few steps, a few more, and he could disarm Stanley…

He was on the tenth step. So close, and Stanley's voice was so loud he might have been right next to him. Still couldn't see a fucking thing: the stairway looked out only into the darkness of the next one. So close. Fifteen more seconds and he'd be there. Fifteen. Fifteen? Was that too slow? Stanford Stanley could make up his mind in fifteen seconds. It was a shock that he'd waited so long. The man's sole job for Moriarty had been to efficiently dispose of the bodies that his boss had racked up. Maybe the only thing that saved you was the fact that he hated you more than anyone. He could have shot you in the head at any time during his years of hiding but he had waited, waited for years sitting atop a mountain of things he wanted to say to you, and now he wanted to get them all out.

And yet, fifteen seconds? He turned again to look at the police, John looking back up at him expectantly. They were all on the stairs behind him now, his only backup, his army doctor friend with a pregnant wife and some semi-competent law enforcement. Wonderful. Fifteen seconds. He should be there in eight. Maybe six. Fifteen was too long. He had already wasted two or three just thinking about it. And as a result he perhaps rushed up to the next step, not testing it out first, and it creaked so loudly he swore that it could be heard from beyond the Thames.

He jerked back so quickly that he nearly caused a domino effect down the rest of the stairs, but the damage had already been done. Stanley went silent in an instant, and in that harrowing moment of silence Sherlock had the utterly slim fantasy that the man thought he was imagining things. A hope that was quickly extinguished by the sound of a gunshot ringing through the deserted building.

The bullet went through you, but he swore that his heart stopped at the sound of it. He killed you. He had been mere yards away from you and he'd killed you! Stanley had hung you from hooks and tried to burn you alive and had abducted you with the intention of torturing you to death, and so far you had survived it all! Killed by a creaking step in a stairwell! That was it, that was it, that was–

Sherlock launched himself into the room, not waiting (as usual) to coordinate with the others. Who could ask that of him? He had just damned his unarmed fiancée through his own carelessness. Days before your wedding. Absurdly, he was focused on the fact that you had no bottoms on and you would be so *irritated* at him for letting you die without proper clothing, that the whole police force was going to see what you looked like in your panties, and your cellulite…

And when he burst into the room it was not your body on the floor but Stanley's. He had been shot not in the stomach this time but in the head, a messy affair that was immortalized in a mess of brain matter behind him. Sherlock looked around in complete confusion for one of Lestrade's snipers positioned in the distance, but the room had no windows. Did Stanley shoot himself? But the angle…

"I did something so impressive!" you complained from the other side of the room. "And look, nobody's looking at me!"

Slowly he turned to face you — the only one able to pull off such a feat — and gawked. Sure enough, there you were, relatively unharmed and a gun in hand despite the fact that he'd definitely seen yours lying on the floor of the changing room all the way back in the bridal shop.

"That was a close one," you proclaimed with a frown, seemingly not too bothered about your sudden violent abduction. "I'm glad someone made that distraction. Honestly, I was getting a little tired waiting for a pause in that big speech of his, but whatever works…"

You were still without trousers, and it seemed that your shirt had gotten mostly unbuttoned as well. He would have gone into a cold rage at that, but it confused him. Stanley had been more placidly asexual than anything, with sex not of real interest to him; what was the point of that?

"I did something impressive and you're looking at my rack!" You laughed and went over to him, pulling him close for a hug. "I need you to censor me while the others are here," you went on as the police scurried about to deal with the body. "John's seen me like this before but at the office they haven't, you know… Oh!"

You pulled away and triumphantly pulled the front of your shirt open, and though John averted his eyes you were trying to gesture towards something else. "See that? They make gun holsters for bras! I got it from America, as you might have guessed… I've been wearing it ever since that time in Dublin when I was locked in the freezer with no gun on me and I thought, *wow! This is inconvenient.* That bastard Stanley couldn't care less enough to pat me down… He must have missed it. I'm just lucky you got here when you did."

So he hadn't killed you! He saved you! Well, mostly. He supposed that he could have done more but he felt fairly satisfied in his contributions. So satisfied that he took it upon himself to close the distance between you and give you not only an extra public kiss, but also the incredibly rare company's-here kiss. The adrenaline was so high between you that both of your hearts were going like mad, and when you pulled away he expected some fantastic line of sorts.

You said: "Did you bring my skirt along with you? It's so chilly up here."

"You always know how to memorialize a drastic situation, don't you?"

"Oh! You shouldn't have worried at all. Well, maybe a little, but there was no big danger. I mean, besides the gun he had pointing at me, but really, after he dragged me through those filthy alleys I was just *pissed.* I was about to turn into a street fighter and clock him with a broken wine bottle or something… Wow! A public embrace, too… Ah, yes…"

The story you had to tell was not so different from the one he'd pieced together from the scene. Lotte had dealt with you on her own and led you away to the changing room. Puzzled at the lack of attentiveness, you opened the door for her when she finally returned and instead found Stanley waiting for you with something in a syringe that he'd stuck into your arm. Obviously it hadn't been a good dosage, as you'd regained consciousness halfway through an alley and had done your best to fight him off, but you were badly coordinated and couldn't get a free arm to get your gun out of its (Victoria's) secret holster.

"It's such a boring story," you admitted. "I just can't believe he waited this long to do it. I'm just glad I never let myself get slow about him. Did you see me get all shocked and stunned when I saw him? Well, *you* didn't, but I most definitely wasn't…"

Lotte was in custody, and though Sherlock had no idea how the other girls would fare, he assumed that Sasha would take over, not because of her actual merits but because she was the only name that he could remember — especially after the hefty 75% discount she gave for Lotte's prized dress, the one that had lured you back to the changing rooms alone.

"I actually don't like it that much," Sasha admitted, shrugging. "She never sold it to anyone. *Anyone!* Didn't even know why we kept it around. Sort of wanted to sell it just to piss her off and here we are."

And that's how it went. You suffered only minor injuries and bounced back with relative ease. One would think that you would be psychologically traumatized after a final showdown with your archenemy, but you seemed much happier with the knowledge that he was dead and that you were sure that he had died by your hand and your hand alone.

"I'm feeling much better than I did in Yverdon-les-Bains," you admitted a few days later to your siblings, who weren't letting you out of their sight until the wedding. "Sherlock hospitalized me, you know. Accidentally, of course, but I think the smoke inhalation made my voice a little raspier… You know, sexier. Can you tell the difference?"

…Your siblings looked like they were definitely going to kill him, but they didn't have time. An hour later your father showed up, ready to stay the weekend for the wedding, completely bright and out-of-the-loop.

"Sweetheart," he exclaimed when he saw you, wrapping you up in his arms. "How have you been? You look a little cut up!"

You laughed and patted him on the back. "Just part of the lifestyle, Dad. Ready to finally meet the man I'm sharing it with?"

And Sherlock met your father, the latter of whom looked him over and decided that he was "all right," a survey that was met with murmurs of approval from your siblings. It was on, then: the wedding of Sherlock Holmes was about to begin.

Some detractors — as in, the paparazzi who attempted to swarm the wedding and who failed in the face of giddy police intervention — would state that you could have looked much better on your wedding day. You'd had no time for your dress to be fitted, and you still had injuries healing from your altercation with Stanford Stanley. Your hairstyle wasn't immaculate and your makeup — oh! Did you do it yourself? And yet every single part of your husband-to-be was relieved at the sight of you ambling down the altar with your father in tow, your eyes on him, your gaze clear and sure and full of things he literally had no idea existed until a matter of years ago and which he understood only now. Perhaps he could never put such sentiment into words, or he would never reduce himself to being the kind of person who would, but it would forever remain in the deepest recesses of his unfailing memory.

You took his hand and squeezed it, standing across from him like some kind of child of a lesser goddess. The wedding planning that had taken your sister so long to sort out had no effect on him: he had only been paying attention for that moment when you stood across from him, waiting for some words to be spoken that would solidify a reality that he already assumed was true.

“I do,” he announced, and waited.

Some members of the congregation — the ones that didn't know him — seemed startled. Donovan, who was invited by someone or the other, groaned audibly from the back. You, of course, could only laugh.

“Sherlock,” you said in a low voice, eyes glimmering with amusement, “I'm glad you're not reluctant or anything, but you have to let the priest finish what he's saying first.”

“I was trying to skip to the important part!”

“Wow! I wasn't paying attention either but at least I'm trying to look dignified while I do it.”

The irritated priest decided to take an eternity through the next few lines, but to you it didn't matter as much. There would only be one moment like this one and you were content to bask in it forever. After years — *years!* — you had finally made it to that point. After Stanford Stanley and Moriarty and Irene Adler and snobby co-workers and dates surrounding cases and long walks in the park to find evidence after a murder, you had made it. *You made it.* It was happening and it wasn't a dream, some dying fantasy as a bullet went through your brain. You had done the impossible and survived the riskiest engagement that a woman could hope for, and for once in your life you could say that you had put stakes in a territory that no one else had ever set foot on.

“I do,” you said, in the right spot. “I do.”

When you were young, you liked to play in some woods that other children swore was haunted. There was a little nook in one of the trees where you could fit yourself in perfectly, a tiny secret base where you could go when a sibling was being a bully or a chore needed to be done. Once you went in there in the late afternoon and awoke to find the sunset bathing you in a warm and rich light, so comfortable that you were contented to stay there forever in that tiny paradise all to yourself. In this life we don't achieve many kisses that make us feel that way, a way that transports you to a paradise, and we must remember the ones that do.

Of course, there would be other memories from that day that imprinted onto your brain, ones that you memorized. You had bent down to fix part of your dress when you heard footsteps behind you and genial laughter from some co-workers. One had spotted you there and called out: “Mrs. Sherlock Holmes!”

You straightened, turned, smiled.

“Yes?”

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## Chapter 55: Non, je ne regrette rien...

**Author's Notes:** ...Double-wow! (Proper capitalization b/c serious) Wow, after literally years, I seriously cannot believe that I'm about to hit "complete" on this story. This story, which as you know was only meant to be less than 30 chapters or so with very short (500 words, top kek) chapters, turned into one of my longest (if not my longest?), most reviewed, most viewed, and most favorited story of all time. I seriously cannot believe it when I see it on the top ten list of most favorited fanfiction on this glorious website, nor can I believe it when I see myself on the list of most favorite authors -- and this would not have been possible without you. So seriously, seriously, with a thousand kisses/hugs from me, thank you to everyone who read this story, supported it, reviewed it, thought about reviewing it, read it at first but stopped reading it, ignored it at first but came in at the end... Seriously, I cannot thank you more for this overwhelming love and support. It's insane to think that I wrote this story before being a freshman in college, and now I'm entering the last semester of my junior year! This story has gone so many places and honestly I'm just glad to have shared it all with you. And, so...

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Your honeymoon with Sherlock was a scenic one: you two stared at the mountain range in front of you, marveling at the wonders of nature. Your new husband was an almost purely scientific creature, and yet even he had some appreciation for the grandiosity of nature, the unequivocal wonder that was a serene and untouched landscape…

“Not that impressive,” he told you.

“Oh, you!” You swatted him on the arm. “You’re just mad because I’ve been to the Smoky Mountains and you haven’t.”

“Why would I envy you? Just hunks of rocks that some people are idiotic enough to climb over.”

“And stars are just balls of gas, but I’ve seen you pause from your tea to look at them appreciatively from time to time.”

“Completely different!”

“No, way…” You flipped onto your stomach. “Anyway, give it here. I want to look at the beach.”

“The beach? Even worse. Heat, excessive cancer-gifting sunlight, crowding, and sand that gets everywhere. A nightmare.”

“A nightmare *if* you’re there, which we aren’t!”

“No fighting on your honeymoon,” John called from the next room over, babysitting one of Sherlock’s experiments to make sure that 221B didn’t burn down while you and Sherlock were enjoying your alleged time away from home.

It was too much to ask Sherlock to leave London for a couple weeks to go on a trip with you directly after the wedding, especially with Moriarty refusing to go away. If it had been anyone else, of course you would have demanded it, but you had been able to kill your own archenemy and it was high time that he could deal with his. As a result, you decided to put it off for a month or two to get some things sorted out, though privately you were hoping to push it sooner, not because you thought your wants more important than England at large, but because you had the chance of getting excellent prices on tickets provided that you got them soon.

“I can’t believe Dad still had this,” you noted appreciatively, flipping through scenic images on your old View-Master. “Stellar condition, don’t you think?”

“Pass it over! I’m missing the beach!”

“Oh, just so you can complain about it? I don’t think so…”

“How’s everything going in here?” John asked, opening the door. You and your husband were sheltered by a reasonably-made blanket fort (that you’d made yourself, Sherlock begrudgingly admitted that worse ideas existed), and for good reason.

“Beautifully, John!” you called back, if only because you were naked and straddling your husband’s chest while carrying a nostalgic children’s toy. “At this rate the real honeymoon will be a disappointment in comparison…”

“Well, what’s next?”

“Oh, maybe a bath in the crystal-clear mountain springs as the waterfall roars above us…”

“I can fill up the tub, but I think all we have on tape are whale sounds.”

“They relax me,” Sherlock shot back in defense.

“Wow!” That sounded even more exciting than a waterfall. “A swim with the whales, then!”

As John departed, probably hearing the smoke detector go off, you wondered if it wasn’t too late to start your husband up for a second round. If you couldn’t yet have a scenic honeymoon, then why not have one full of fucking? Seemed like a fair trade… But, oh, there’d be so much time for that. There always was, regardless of ever-present danger lurking on the horizon!

“And then after, we can start our dinner in Italy,” you went on, referring to the red sauce, box of pasta and assorted spices you’d brought over from your apartment. “We can’t make too much of a mess, though. Mrs. Hudson won’t be back until tomorrow morning.”

“And you mean we haven’t made a mess here already?”

“Well, nothing you can’t see without a black light.”

“I meant your ridiculous temporary fortress, but I’ll consider that as well.” He couldn’t find it too ridiculous, as he wasn’t complaining about you naked and on top of him, but you could accept it.

“Hmmm.” You had reached the end of slides on the View-Master and were contemplating your next move, namely moving forwards or backwards on your husband’s body.

“If you’re thinking about tomato sauce, make sure to not add as much basil as you did the last time.”

“What! That was delicious.”

“Because you ate three plates? Hardly novel, considering all you ate at the wedding.”

“Yeah, I was eating for two, wasn’t I?” You got a little embarrassed, remembering everything that you put away. “Maybe enough for three. It’s a surprise that dress didn’t explode off of me at the end of it.”

“I was shocked you had enough energy to dance. Usually after that take-in you’re in a food coma for hours.”

“Are you jealous about that man with the legs? He was nice; I liked his funny bowtie.”

“Friend of yours?”

“I thought he was with you.”

“Really? I thought the same about you!”

“Why would I ever associate with a man like that?”

You shot him a disapproving look — as disapproving as one can look with a View-Master — before a thought hit you and you stopped abruptly on his body.

“What?” He wriggled around underneath you. “What is it?”

You could only laugh, letting yourself fall over sideways so that you could be beside him. “Oh, just thinking about… Recurring themes, I guess.”

“Of what sort?”

“I’m not sure yet.”

“Not sure of what it is, or not sure if it’s a theme yet?”

“You know — I went into work the day after to get a record I left into my office. It was funny. I ran into Lestrade and I think he’s starting to wear Molly’s perfume.”

Sherlock blanked on you. “Why would he do that?”

“I know you’re not not-following because I was too subtle. Have you blocked out the suggestion that Molly and Lestrade hooked up at our wedding? Because I’m sitting here in love with it.”

He wrapped an arm around you and used the other to take the View-Master, idly working through it. “If you like it, then I don’t see any reason why I shouldn’t.”

“Hmm.” You pressed yourself against his side, breathing him in, just — enjoying his proximity to you. To think that years ago, when you’d first met him, you’d be in this position… It was absolutely unthinkable, yet you couldn’t complain about how anything turned out. How did it go? *Non, je ne regrette rien…*

“I was thinking,” he said, still looking at whatever was in the View-Master, “that we could go to Austria for our honeymoon… When it happens.”

You smiled. “Because you finally appreciate mountains, or because there’s some case going on there and it’s a convenient spot where you can solve a murder and I’m your good-looking and talented sidekick?”

“…Yes.”

“I think it’s worth thinking about…” Another little thought hit you and impulsively you opened your mouth. “But, something else worth talking about–”

“Did you really dance with Anderson back there? The real mystery as to why he was invited in the first place.”

“Oh, you didn’t see him tear up when we read our vows? I thought it was cute. And didn’t he just blow you away? He might have been a better dancer than you.”

That actually seemed to offend him and you just laughed, rolling back on top of him, not out of lust but out of just wanting to be in contact with him, your skin against his, warmth against warmth. “My brother surprised you, didn’t he? He had a plus-two. I had no idea he had it in with twins.”

“After that kidnapping case with twins in New Zealand I have a strong suspicion for twins.”

“You can’t fool me; You were so impressed you nearly let them get away with it.” You snuggled against his chest. “Well, Sherlock, it’s a subject change, but…”

“How long do you want your holiday? You hardly take any from work. I’m sure they can let you go four or five–”

“Weeks?”

“Months.”

You were foreseeing a slight problem with that, but you supposed you couldn't complain about getting away from the office for a bit. "Well, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. How do you–"

"I just don't want you feeling relegated to being secondary to my work. As important as is…"

"Oh, yes, saving the world and all…"

"You should know…" He stopped, figuring out the words, making an effort to make sure they weren't too soppy or goopy or sentimental. "You should know…"

"I love you too," you filled in for him, taking his hand and pressing utterly sentimental kisses to his knuckles, until you got to his ring finger. "Finally. It's about time someone else starts wearing a ring in this relationship."

"A typical material expression of an invisible, purely chemical feeling. Typical of this society to express such a feeling, the demand to prove to crowds of absolute idiots who don't know any better to prove affection through jewelry. I…"

"Shh… Ah! You should know that three months after you proposed I found how much you spent on this ring — You know? You're in quite a position to talk about that sort of thing."

"Well, I…" It was perhaps the first time you'd seen him get embarrassed all honeymoon, which was something you could check off your wish list. "I did want you to say yes. I was… agitated. Of course, I never enter a situation where I'm not completely certain I can control the outcome, but…"

"You want me to make you stop talking, right? Is this still your way of asking for a kiss? You've got it…" And you moved forward to envelop him in one, your body pressed against his, a comforting weight, one he was so entirely used to that he seemed to suffocate without it.

You had once told his brother (who had made good on his promise to give you a hefty wedding gift) that you would follow Sherlock anywhere, and it seemed that you were coming through with your promise with complete enthusiasm. Of course you had come to the conclusion that your marriage could never be a quiet or rosy one, and perhaps even in old age he would still be kicking up a fuss around criminals even if he was tending to bees or something like that. And you knew in advance, completely and utterly without regret, that you would be more than happy to help him handle it all.

The kiss turned intense without you quite realizing it, and when you broke apart he was almost shocked into silence. Oh, still so easy to startle him with lust! Would he ever change? You hoped not. Nothing like a kiss on the nape of his neck to get him to freeze up when he went on a rant in front of his microscope. And he would always indulge you when you came in sleepy in the morning, bedheaded with a big robe on carrying some coffee as he let you press a kiss to his dark curls… Oh! He had practically compromised his principles just by marrying you and you weren't going to stop experimenting with how far he went! He had already taken you to just about everywhere. How could you choose between them all for a honeymoon?

"Sherlock…" And then you *had* to tell him; you at least had to mention it. It would be criminally unfair otherwise. You weren't even sure of it yourself, but as a woman you felt like you had at least some knowledge of your inner workings. The suggestion had been on your mind since the day after the wedding, but you figured that, if it were true, your husband would have noticed it by now. Because he'd done it with Mary, right? Or was he just selectively oblivious? More important matters on his mind? You could probably ignore a freight train roaring just above your head whenever you had sex with him, true…

"What is it?" he asked you, his voice all foggy in that far-away manner of his when he was either too tired or too lustful to continue. You rarely saw him in the former so you had to guess the latter. (And that had been another thing he probably thought he'd never do before he met you! Ah, what luck you had!)

"Oh, Sherlock!" The full force of your love for him hit you like the freight train you might have been ignoring, and you wrapped your arms around his neck, turning the both of you over in a hug, your face buried against his neck as you took in the scent of the cologne you'd bought him as a random present after he'd gotten you jewels from Cairo. "I'll go lure out murderers for you in Bucharest! I'll pull you out of a building burning in Cardiff! I'll even follow you to Siberia, I don't care…"

"What is it?" he repeated helplessly, crushed not by your embrace but by the wave of these emotions crashing down on him as he let himself be enveloped by it all. It had been a long time since he had considered sentiment to be a poison, yet you still surprised him with the intensity of what you felt, and he had no idea when it would cease to shock him.

"Oh, honey, it's…" You would still need to take a test, of course, but now you were feeling surer of yourself, and in a flight of giddy fancy you almost laughed. "It might be nothing, it's *probably* nothing, but in case it isn't… Well, we've talked about it before and I remembered what you said but we could talk about it more…"

"Talk about what, exactly?" He had talked about nearly every possible subject in the English language with you, though more seemed to pop up every day. Though he was immensely grateful that whenever he brought up some case about someone killed with an oar, you came in for the assist with a pun…

"Sherlock, I… Well…" Your heart was going faster, your breath lighter and faster and softer than before, though your question seemed so innocent. You pulled yourself away and propped yourself up on his chest, marveling over him. Maybe he was just selectively oblivious, or perhaps he wasn't as quick about deducing things that didn't involve you sleeping without pants on.

He looked back at you and there seemed to be all the wisdom of the world locked away in your eyes and for a stupid moment Sherlock Holmes wondered if you were going to ask him the most important question of his life. Looking back it seemed that you had done it two or three times already and he wasn't sure as to how he was supposed to prepare himself.

"Sherlock… Just how *do* you feel about — children?"

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